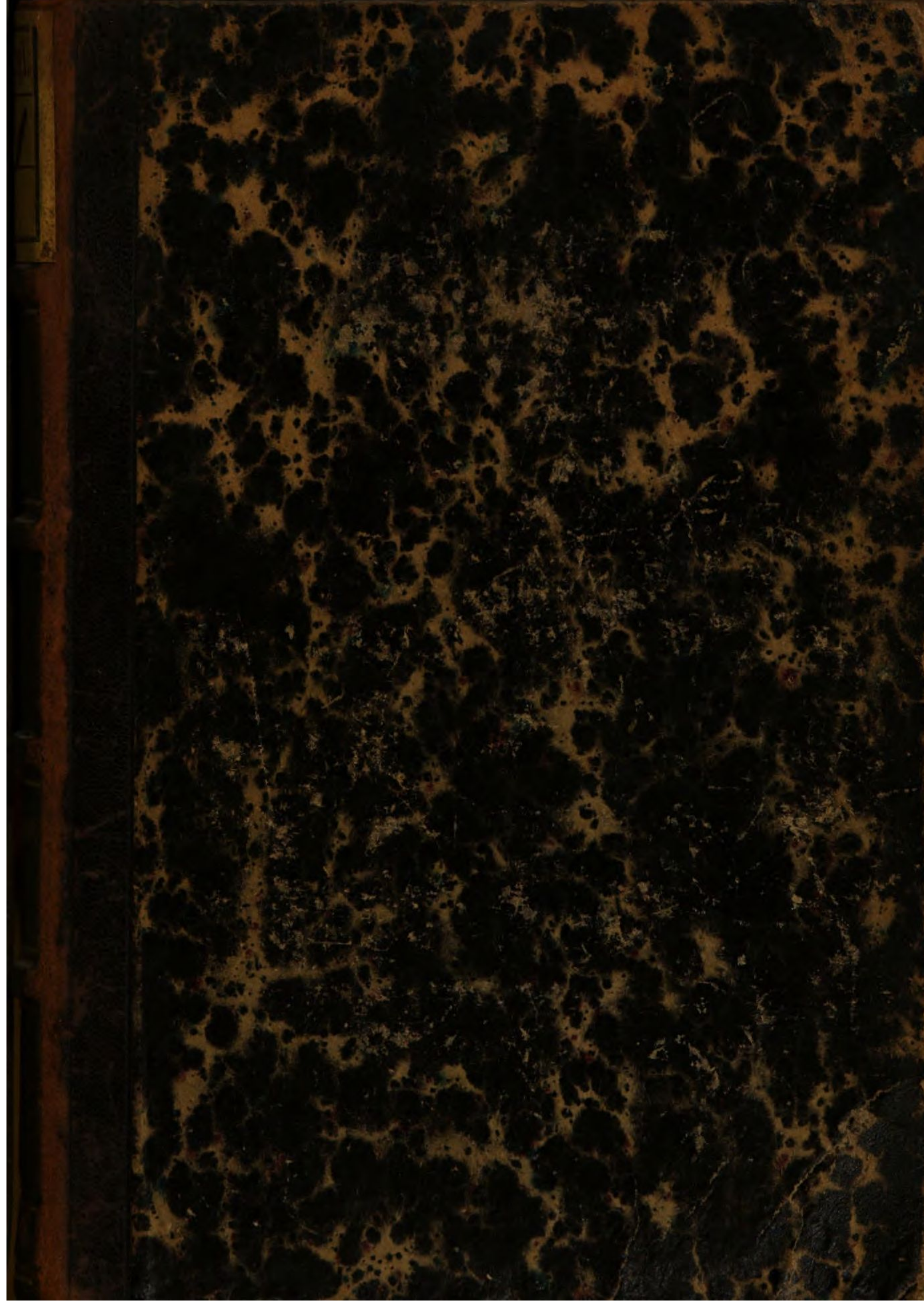




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FRIENDSHIP

BY

OUIDA,

AUTHOR OF "IN A WINTER CITY," "ARIADNÊ,"
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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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1878.

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FRIENDSHIP



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FRIENDSHIP.

CHAPTER I.

"It is a pull, sister," said the elder Miss Moira, of Craig Moira, to the younger.

"It is a pull, sister. But we promised Archie."

"We promised Archie, and I'm wishful to see how she gets on wi' the man that sold carpets."

So the carriage, bearing the Misses Moira, of Craig Moira, their plaids, pugs, ear-trumpets, and courier, continued its course across the Roman Campagna, and up the steep and wooded roads that led to the old Castle of Fiordelisa.

The Misses Moira, of Moira, lived on their own lands in Caithness, were very rich, very ugly, very eccentric, spoke with a strong native accent, and delivered their opinions uncalled for; two of their sisters' children were respectively the Duchess of Forfar, and the Marquis of Fingal; the younger was the echo of the elder—both wore spectacles, both were deaf; and neither ever forgot that the Moiras, of Craig Moira, had the right to sit before their sovereign, and were allied with half the bluest blood and highest names in Great Britain.

They were now about to call on one of their connections, and gazed anxiously through their spectacles for the Castle of Fiordelisa, where she dwelt. Fiordelisa came at last in sight, a grey, rambling, and ancient pile,

set amidst cypress and ilex woods, with its gardens straying down into its farm-lands in Italian fashion, covering hills and plains with corn and vine and olive.

"A braw place this, but ill-kept," said the elder Miss Moira, as they entered a dark avenue of ancient oaks, "and has the idolatrous emblems even at the very gates."

She shut her eyes not to see the Pietà let into the wall under the woods, and kept them shut lest she should see any more such signs. They had been brought into the land of such mummeries, under protest, by the dangerous illness of a beloved sister, mother of her young Grace of Forfar, at Naples, and the sister being restored to health, they were hastening away from the scene of abominations, only pausing a few days in Rome because the younger of them was somewhat of an invalid, and unequal to rapid travelling.

The sudden stoppage of the carriage made the elder Miss Moira open her eyes. They had arrived at the entrance door of Fiordelisa.

Between the centre columns of a beautiful loggia, built by Bramante, there was standing a handsome, black-browed woman, a little in advance of two gentlemen, who stood one on each side of her, awaiting the arrival of the guests.

She was the Lady Joan Challoner.

With ardour and cordial eagerness of welcome she rushed down the stone steps and darted to the carriage.

"Oh, dearest Miss Moira, how kind of you! And dear Miss Elizabeth, too. How sorry I am not to be in Rome! We go down for good the day after to-morrow. If I had only known you were coming there, of course I should have gone in last week. Let me present them to you—Mr. Challoner; Prince Ioris. Come in, pray, out of

the sun. Yes, even in November it is oppressively warm. You must be overladen with all those plaids. Robert——
Io——”

“Enchanté de l'honneur de vous voir, mesdames,” murmured a tall, graceful, dark-eyed person, with a sweet smile and a low bow, coming forward on to the first step, and offering his arm to the old gentlewoman.

“Hoot toot, man! Canna ye speak yer own tongue?” said the elder Miss Moira sharply, accepting the arm of her host, as she thought, and entering the house with him, whilst her sister followed with their hostess, who was talking eagerly into her ear-trumpet; the other gentleman, who had a Scotch face and a German manner, and looked like a fusion between a Leipzig philologist and an American senator, made a feeble attempt to offer his arm as well, but hesitated, not seeing very well how to do it, and halted midway, making believe to hold back a barking Clumber spaniel.

The whole party passed into the loggia, and thence into the first great apartment opening out from it, where some twenty other people, English and American residents of Rome, had been gathered to do honour to the Misses Moira, of Moira, and were taking tea, eating grapes, and looking at pictures and china. Seated, the two ladies looked round the noble tapestried guest-chamber with some bewilderment and some vague displeasure.

“So ye’re Joan Perth-Douglas that was?” said the elder Miss Moira, bringing her spectacles to bear on her hostess. “Ye were a slip of twelve when we saw ye last——twenty years ago, aye, twenty years and more. Will ye tell me why your good husband talks French to us?”

“Allow me, madam,” murmured the gentleman who looked like a Leipzig philologist and an American senator, offering to relieve her of her plaids.

"Don't be officious, man!" said Miss Moira, sharply. "My sister's no richt in the lungs, and your master's house is draughty."

The gentleman shrank back.

"I never saw a Scot so dark as your good husband, Joan," pursued the elder Miss Moira, adhering to her original thoughts, sternly fastening her glasses upon the graceful and dark-eyed personage, who murmured a soft and perplexed "Plaît-il, Madame?"

"Have you lived among Papists till you've forgot every word of the tongue you were born to, sir?" asked Miss Moira of him, believing that she was addressing a fellow-countryman.

"You must be inconvenienced by all those plaids, madam. Do allow me——" commenced in a kind of despair the other person who had been scouted.

"Canna ye wait till ye're spoke to!" said the lady, turning on him in wrath at the interference. "Canna ye teach your servants better ways, Leddy Joan, than to gird at a body like that? A very brown man for a Scot, your husband, though extraordinary well-favoured. How comes it he canna talk his own tongue?"

"That is not my husband," said the Lady Joan hurriedly, with a flush rising on her face and a laugh to her eyes. "You are mistaken, dear Miss Moira. I introduce people so badly; this is only Ioris, a friend, you know. My husband, Mr. Challoner, you've been taking for a servant, and scolding about your plaids."

The well-bred twenty people who were taking tea at Fiordelisa were not so perfectly well-bred that they could help a little titter as they listened.

"Prut-tut!" cried the elder Miss Moira, with her head higher in the air, being a person who never recognised her own errors, let them be made manifest as they might.

"*This* man received us, certainly he received us, at the door (I am correct, sister?). Certainly he received us, Leddy Joan. If *you* be master here," she demanded with sudden vigour of the gentleman whom she was informed was Mr. Challoner, as he returned with a cup of tea and a cream-jug—"if *you* be master here, why don't you behave like it? Are you master, eh?"

Mr. Challoner, conscious of the twenty well-bred people and irrepressible ill-bred titter, begged Miss Moira to tell him if she took much sugar or little.

"I can sugar for myself!" said that lady with asperity. "So *you* are Leddy Joan's husband, are you? You don't seem to conduct yourself like it. But I thought the other was very dark for a Scot."

"Do you take cream, madam?" murmured Mr. Challoner, bending his back stiffly over the silver jug, whilst Miss Moira stared with stony gaze at the coronets and coats of arms on the chairs.

"Whose quarterings are those?" she demanded. "They're none known north o' Tweed, nor north o' Thames either for that matter; the shape o' the shield——"

"Dear Miss Moira, allow me," said the Lady Joan, avoiding heraldry by bringing up a small division of the twenty well-bred people for presentation. But Miss Moira was not to be so lightly diverted from her purpose. Having bent her head as many times as politeness required, she retained her grasp on Mr. Challoner, and returned to her original investigations. "A fine place," she resumed, letting her spectacles rove from the timber roof to the mosaic floor; "a fine place; is it your own?"

Mr. Challoner murmured inarticulately, and stooped for the sugar-tongs.

"Bought it?" said Miss Moira sharply.

"No—not precisely."

"Hired it?"

"Not exactly. That is at least——"

Mr. Challoner shifted his eyeglass, and, being an exact man, paused to find an exact word.

"Oh, my gude soul, then if ye've na bought it and na hired it, it's na yours at all, and what for be ye speering to ask us into it?"

Mr. Challoner wondered to himself why an unkind Providence would move old maiden ladies from their own safe ingle-nooks by grey Atlantic shores, and muttered something of "a friend, an old friend."

"Oh, it's the dark man's, is it? He don't look old," said Miss Moira, "and you and your good leddy live in it out of friendship. Is that the custom in this papistical country, pray, sir?"

Mr. Challoner murmured that he thought it was the custom—"the houses were so large, the nobility were so poor——"

"And has *he* a good lady? What does she say to it? Certainly, Leddy Joan asked us out here as to her *own* place. Quite clearly—her own place. I am correct, sister?"

"Quite correct, sister. Her own place."

"Ioris is not married," said Mr. Challoner, wondering if he could drop the sugar-tongs again without too much awkwardness. "He is a good fellow. We are very much attached to him. Will you like to see my green-houses? I am curious in the nymphaea—cyanea, cærulea, rubra——"

"A pond-lily 's a puir feckless taste for a man," said Miss Moira severely. "Archie asked us to come and see his daughter, and so we came. But certainly when she called on us she said her 'own place'—most distinctly her own place."

"Oh, she has got into the habit of calling it so; she has done so much for it——"

"But if it be the young man's——"

Lady Joan Challoner begged at that moment to present to Miss Moira an Anglican clergyman.

The Anglican clergyman disposed of, Miss Moira, of Craig Moira, returned to the charge.

"Eh, but it must be a perilous experiment—twa masters under one roof."

"Eh, it must, indeed," murmured the younger Miss Moira. "Mony voices make muckle strife."

"Aye, they do. Tell me now, do you twa good gentlemen never fash one another?"

"Never," said Mr. Challoner cordially, but his cold light eyes fell as he spoke.

"Then ye're just no human, sir," said Miss Moira with emphasis; "and Joan Perth-Douglas had always a sharp tongue of her own. Perth-Douglas women never were easy to live with. You seem a quiet body yourself, but still——"

"Let me show you my wife's fowls. The fame of the poultry of Craig Moira——" commenced Mr. Challoner.

"Still, I think you're no wise, and so I'll tell Archie," continued Miss Moira, not to be moved even by praise of her poultry-yard. "It's a queer way of living, and certainly she said her own place, 'her own place,' and ye'll no take offence, for I always speak my mind, but that Papist's a deal too bonny to look at, and Leddy Joan's a young woman still."

"My dear madam! I have not the most distant idea of your meaning——"

"Then ye're just a fule, sir," said Miss Moira sharply.

"Will you look at my wife's poultry? She has some spangled bantams that——"

"Eh? Joan Perth-Douglas has taken to cocks and hens and bubbly-jocks, has she? Weel, there's no accounting for conversions. Perth-Douglas women were always a handful. I've known three generations of them, and they always were masterful. Dear douce Archie never daured say his soul was his own. Yes, I'll come and see your chicks and stove plants. But how can they be yours if the place is the Papist's?"

"It was a tumble-down old barrack. We have spent a good deal on it. One is always glad to do good to a friend," murmured Mr. Challoner, a little vaguely, offering his arm to his tormentor.

"Humph!" said the elder Miss Moira with a sniff.

"We are quite farmers here, you know," Mr. Challoner continued, leading the way through courts and chambers to the open air. "The whole thing had gone to rack and ruin when we took it in hand. Italians are so improvident, and the national habits are so wasteful. But my wife's energy is wonderful; whatever she undertakes prospers——"

"Humph!" said the elder Miss Moira once more. "And the handsome Papist, is he grateful to ye for her energy?"

"Oh, don't talk about gratitude. There is no question of that! We are always glad to be of use to our friends, and Ioris is an excellent fellow. Ask Lord Archie."

Lord Archie was an idol of Craig Moira, and his word was law there. Miss Moira was softened by it, and her suspicions were mollified. She consented to be conducted through the green-houses, praised the bantams, and only sniffed a little as she passed the open door of the castle chapel, where some peasants were going in for vespers. She returned in a more amiable frame of mind

to her sister and her sofa, and relented enough to take a fresh cup of tea and some fruit, which was handed her with exquisite grace by the Prince Ioris. Miss Moira's eyes through their spectacles followed the Prince Ioris to the other end of the large reception-room.

"He's an elegant-made man and a taking one," she said to her host; "and I think ye're no wise to live in the same house with him. Oh, ye've no need to glower and look glum: an old body like me can tell truth without fashin' anybody, and ye know that we and Archie's people have foregathered all our lives, and it never was hid from us that Joan Perth-Douglas was masterful, and had her cantrips. Lord, man! do ye think they'd have wedded her to a mere decent body like you, if she hadn't been a handful? Not they; they're proud-stomached, and ye sold carpets and the like in Bagdad."

"Really, madam——" Mr. Challoner shifted his eyeglass, and felt that this kind of amiability was worse to bear than the previous antagonism.

"Hoot! it's no sort of use giving yourself bobberies with us. We know all about you," said Miss Moira pleasantly. "Your forbears were decent folks, dwellers on my cousin Allandale's lands on the Border for mony a generation, pious canny bodies, but sma traders all. I mind well when I was a bit lassie, and staying at Allandale's, buying tapes and pins and what not, at your grandmother's little shop. She sold snuff and letter papers, and had the post, and sold stamps as weel—twa bawbee stamps they were in those days. Ye mind it too, don't ye, sister?"

"Richt well, sister. She sold sweeties too."

"Lord, man, it's sma' blame to ye. Your folk were all decent folk in the Cheviots, and true believers. But I'll not deny that when ye stuck up on your countin' house

stool so high that ye mated with Archie's daughter, we did set our necks stiff, and——"

Mr. Challoner threw down a piece of majolica. It belonged to the house, and would cost him nothing, and the crash of the falling vase spared him more recollections of Allandale.

"Sister, we must be going. The sun's well-nigh down," said the elder Miss Moira, when the majolica was picked up. "Now, sir, take an old woman's word, and don't disremember that your good leddy's a Perth-Douglas, and Perth-Douglas women are always like bucking fillies; and the Papist's got a face o' grace and a pretty way with him. Oh, you may get on your high horse as ye like! Sense is sense. Still, I'm glad to see ye have such a trust in your wife, and it speaks well for ye both, and shows she's given over her cantrips; and I'm sorry I fashed ye about your grandame, but there's nothing to be ashamed of, nothing at all. She was a good clean religious body, and I'm not one to look down on ye because ye are not what we are, though I'm free to own when they married Joan to ye we quarrelled with Archie, as far as anybody ever can quarrel with him, the fair sweet-spoken soul——"

Mr. Challoner, conscious of a sudden silence that had fallen on the twenty well-bred people scattered about, behind and around him, in which the voice of his torturer fell horribly loud and distinct, wished that the mosaic floor would open as the gulf for Curtius.

"Joan's a fine-featured woman," pursued Miss Moira, rising in all her plaids, "but she's a Perth-Douglas, and she's got a wild eye. You mind my word when I'm gone. Look after her well with the Papist. And now, gude day, and many thanks to ye, Leddy Joan. I'm mighty glad to see ye've taken to such a sober thing as tillin' land and fatten' fowls, and I hope ye'll keep steady at it; and,

yes, to be sure, I'll remember ye to my niece, Forfar, though she's never seen ye, and I doubt if she's ever heard o' ye, and ye're scarce cousin to her, as ye're sayin'—it's very far away, indeed; one of your forbears in the last century married the then duke's seventh daughter, and they were Archie's father's great grandfather's cousins-german—still it counts, oh yes, it counts, and I'll give her your love for certain; and so I'll bid ye fareweel, and many thanks to ye, and we'll return it in kind whenever ye come north again. And I suppose ye don't travel with the Papist, but ye can explain to him that we'd be glad to see him in Caithness, for it might be the saving of his soul if he came in reach of the true doctrine, and our minister would weary the Lord for him night and day, for he is a personable man and a courteous, and it is sad to think he will burn in the life everlasting."

"Mille remerciements, Mesdames, et à revoir," murmured the Prince Ioris, vaguely gathering that they were wishing him well, and offering them a bouquet of autumnal heliotrope and Louise de Savoie roses.

The Miss Moiras accepted the flowers, and drove away in state, pugs, plaids, ear-trumpets, courier, and all, on their return journey towards Rome.

"There is a deal in manner, sister," said the elder Miss Moira, as she smelt the heliotrope.

"There is, sister. What were ye meaning?"

"That the Papist has a manner, and that the carpet man hasn't," replied the elder Miss Moira. "Let us hope that Leddy Joan canna see the difference, and has steadied down. But I have my doubts, sister."

"And ye do well to have your doubts, sister. Ye were ever very sharp o' sight."

The elder Miss Moira sniffed with scorn the bland air of the Roman twilight.

"It needs but half an eye, Elizabeth, to see that a Perth-Douglas woman loves her cantrips, and that the Papist is a deal bonnier to look at than the person that sold carpets. But she was very civil, and her gude man seems a well-meaning douce body, and she's steadied down; I shall say so everywhere; she's steadied down, and we must do all we can for her, sister. She is Archie's daughter."

"She is Archie's daughter, sister."

The elder Miss Moira would have changed her amicable intentions if she could have seen her hostess dancing a war-dance in the loggia, and snapping her fingers after the vanishing carriage.

"The hateful old cats!" cried the Lady Joan, "I thought they'd never go! Wretched old women! Why didn't you stop their tongues, Robert? And what an ass *you* were, Io, receiving them like that. Of course they couldn't help finding out the house was yours, and old idiots like those will never understand——"

"They were good harmless people," said the Prince Ioris, in his own tongue, a little timidly, standing under the arch of his loggia, and watching the sunset.

"Stuff! They are the most horrid old harridans in existence. But every old hag seems good to you. I do believe you see good in everybody! The idea, too, of wasting those roses on 'em! Roses sell for half a franc apiece now. And giving them yourself, too! They've been boring Mr. Challoner to death about what you are here, and whose the house is. But you're always doing something ridiculous. Only remember this. Give your head away with the roses next time, if you like, only all I insist is—don't compromise *me*!"

The Prince Ioris was silent. He leaned against a column of the loggia, and watched the sun go down behind the hills.

Lady Joan Challoner and her husband went within to the twenty well-bred people, and busied themselves pleasantly with them, and gave parting smiles and Muscat grapes to some, and retained a few to dinner.

Meanwhile, the Miss Moiras rolled onward to Rome through the descending mists of evening, and nodding amidst their cushions, fell asleep, until roused by the cessation of all movement and a voice they knew, they were startled to find that the carriage was entering the gates of Rome. A gentleman, old, bent, feeble, smiled and nodded, came up and shook hands, as the horses were stopped for a moment by the pressure of traffic. This gentleman was Lord George Scrope-Stair, an old acquaintance and a privileged person.

"You have been to see Pope Joan?" he said, with a little laugh. "Did you like Fiordelisa?" and he nodded and laughed again. "Ah! yes, we always call her Pope Joan; I do, at least, when my daughters don't hear me; Pope Joan keeps the keys of both heaven and earth and ousts Peter out of his own palace, you know! Only my little joke; don't tell the girls. Good night."

And the old man, who had been once a dandy and a beau in days when George the Fourth was King, walked onward in the twilight, chuckling feebly.

"Pope Joan!" echoed Miss Moira of Moira as their carriage rolled over the stones. "Sister, I wish we had not gone to the place!"

"So do I, sister," said the echo.

They went peacefully home to their hotel and dined, with misgivings weighing on their souls; and then, being

tired, slept again until the elder Miss Moira awoke from a blissful doze with a start.

"I wonder whose the place really is, sister?" she mumbled as she yawned.

"I wonder, sister," said the echo.

CHAPTER II.

It was sunset on the Pincio on the first day of December. Beyond St. Peter's there was that sky of purple and of gold which always seems so much more marvellous here than it does anywhere else; that roseleaf warmth and soft transparency of flame-like colour which those who have looked on it never will forget so long as their lives shall last on earth.

Below, loud, cracked, discordant bells were chiming one against another; near at hand a military band was playing very fast and very much out of tune, waltzes of Strauss's; a monk, the worse for wine, was screaming homilies from a bench, and guards were vainly striving to arrest him amidst the laughter of the crowd; but nothing spoiled the grandeur of the scene, or could destroy the sublime calmness of the declining day, as the broken green lines of the hills grew black against the burning scarlet of the clouds, and the vast expanse of roofs and spires, cupolas and towers, obelisks and gardens, ruins and palaces, colossal temples and desolate marshes, that is all called Rome, stretched away wide and vague and solemn as a desert; with a sun, nearly as red and rayless as the desert's, hanging above the cross on the great dome.

It was four o'clock; and there was the customary crowd of fashionable idlers, fretting horses, emblazoned

carriages, sauntering dandies, handsome artists, tired invalids, black-robed priests and scarlet-clad janitors, cuirassed soldiers and curly-headed children, violet-gowned seminarists and purple-gowned scholars, and, first and foremost, fashionable ladies chattering at the top of their voices about the first fox-hunt of the year, the first court ball, the new arrivals, and the Pope's state of health.

The sun was going down in majesty behind the round domes raised to lay the restless soul of Nero; but up here on the hill nobody scarcely looked at it, but idling and laughing and talking people turned their backs to the west, to hear the music better, and kept looking instead at one woman as she passed, and murmured to each other in a little flutter: "Dear me! There is Etoile, and the Coronis," and then reassured each other, and said, "Yes, indeed—oh yes, really—that is Etoile with the Coronis," in a certain tone of disappointment because she was only like any other well-dressed woman after all, and humanity considers that when genius comes forth in the flesh the touch of the coal from the altar should have left some visible stigmata on the lips it has burned, as, of course anybody knows, it invariably leaves some smirch upon the character.

Humanity feels that genius ought to wear a livery, as Jews and loose women wore yellow in the old golden days of distinction.

"They don't even paint!" said one lady, and felt herself aggrieved.

Nevertheless the lady and all the rest of the crowd continued to look.

Dorotea Coronis, they had all of them seen many scores of times through their opera-glasses at Covent Garden, the Grand Opera, and the theatre at Baden;

but Etoile they had hardly any of them ever seen, and they stared hard with all the admirable impudence of a well-born mob.

"They don't seem to see us," said the aggrieved lady who had wondered they did not paint.

"Look deuced proud," muttered an Englishman who had lifted his hat eagerly, and put it on sulkily, being unnoticed.

The carriage swept by again, and both the women in it looked at the sunset, and not at the crowd. The crowd began to feel neglected, and to grow ill-natured. Sovereigns took the trouble to bow: why could not these two whose only royalty was that of art?

"Who is Etoile?" said the crowd.

"An enigma without an Œdipus," said one of its items, who thought himself a wit.

"There is no enigma at all, except in your imaginations," said another item, who was old and grave, which was a foolish remark, no doubt, because an enigma that is purely imaginary must be of necessity the most puzzling of all, since it follows as a matter of course that nobody ever can solve it.

The carriage paused, and its occupants bought Parma violets. The crowd was disposed to think there must be some motive for the action, as it eyed dubiously the boarhound trotting behind the carriage, and would fain have believed that his tongue hanging out meant a mystery, and that he broke a commandment in wagging his tail.

It is one of the privileges of celebrity that the person celebrated can never wash his hands or open an umbrella without being accredited with some occult reason for his proceedings.

"Is it really Etoile?" said the crowd. Generally

speaking people were disposed to believe that she was not herself, but somebody else.

She did not see them. She had a sad habit of not seeing those who surrounded her. When recalled to a sense of her negligence she begged the pardon of others for having overlooked them, she was not readily forgiven. People would rather be insulted than be unperceived.

Her equipage, with its long-tailed Roman horses, went the round of the Pincio, past the cactus and aloes, the water clock and the kiosques for toys, the music-stands and the garden chairs and the various other embellishments placed here, where Augustus mused, and Cæsar and Pompeius supped.

She gazed at the lovely light, rosy as blown pomegranate leaves, with little puffs of golden cloud upon it, light as a cherub's curls.

"How matchless it is!" she said, with a sigh.

"It is Rome," said Dorotea Coronis.

And for them both, the crowd ceased to exist. They only saw the slow-descending sun.

To be wise in this world one should always be blind to the sunset, but never to the people that bow. The sun, neglected, will not freckle us any more than if we had penned him a thousand sonnets as the lord of light. A man or a woman, slighted, will burn us brown all over with blistering spots of censure indelible as stains of iodine, and deep as wounds of vitriol.

"Is it really Etoile?" said the crowd eagerly, and scarcely looked at the brilliant Gitana-like loveliness of her companion, the great Coronis, because it was familiar, but turned and stared with all the stony-hearted inquisitiveness of Society at the little they could see of the one whom they called Etoile, which was indeed only a heap of silver-fox furs, a pile of violets, a knot of old

Flemish lace, and dreaming serious eyes that watched the sunset.

She herself scarcely saw that any crowd was there. This kind of oblivion was usually her deadliest sin, and she was unconscious that she sinned, which made it very much worse. People blew their bubbles, or threw their stones about her, and she never heeded either, though indeed the stones came so thickly sometimes that she ought in common gratitude to have been flattered; calumny is the homage of our contemporaries, as some South Sea Islanders spit on those they honour.

Popularity has been defined as the privilege of being cheered by the kind of people you would never allow to bow to you.

Fame may be said to be the privilege of being slandered at once by the people who do bow to you, as well as by the people who do not.

"Who is she?" said the crowd on the Pincio.

Nobody there knew at all. So everybody averred they knew for certain. Nobody's story agreed with anybody else's, but that did not matter at all. The world, like Joseph's father, gives the favourite a coat of many colours which the brethren rend.

"She says herself—" hinted the old grave idler, member of many clubs, but nobody wanted to hear what she said herself. *Pas si bête!* Of course she told a story well and laid on the right colours; nobody had talents like hers for nothing.

The old idler got no listeners, and went away pensively to lean on the parapet. He was so far in the minority as to believe what she said herself; which was quite simple and comparatively uneventful, and, therefore, evidently improbable. If she had said she had new lovers every night, and killed them in a back garden

every morning, like the Jewess of the French Regency, people might have believed: there would have been nothing staggeringly and audaciously impossible about that.

The crowd on the Pincio, when the whisper of her name had first run through it, had been alive with admiration and cordiality; but the crowd felt that it had had cold water thrown on its enthusiasm, and so began to hiss, as fire under cold water always does.

"Very clever, indeed," said the crowd. "Oh, yes, no doubt. Oh, wonderful, quite wonderful, every one knew that; but who was she? Ah! nobody could tell. Oh yes, indeed, it was quite well known. She was a beggar's brat found on a doorstep; she was a cardinal's offspring; she was a princess's *petite faute*; she was a Rothschild's mistress; she was a Cabinet Minister's craze; she was poor de Morny's daughter; she had been a slave in Circassia; she had been a serf in White Russia; she had been found frozen, with a tambourine in her hand, outside the gates at Vincennes; her father was at the galleys, her mother kept an inn. No, they were both Imperial spies and very rich; no, they were both dead; no, nobody ever said that, they said this. The poor Emperor knew beyond doubt; and the secret had died with him. She was quite out of society, she was in the highest society; she was not received anywhere, she was received everywhere. Oh, that was not true, but this was. Well, the less said the better."

When the world has decided that the less said the better, it always proceeds directly to say everything in the uttermost abundance that it can possibly think of, and it did so on the Pincio this day at sunset, and asked a variety of questions as well.

"Why had she come?"

"Was she going to remain?"

"Would she go out at all?"

"Would she receive?"

"Would she be received?"

"Would she go the legations?"

"Were those Russian furs?"

"Was that dress Worth's?"

"Why did she stop her horses there, with her back to everybody, where she couldn't hear a note of the music?"

So they chattered in much excitement, gazing at her through their eyeglasses, or from under their parasols.

Nobody there happened to know anything, except that she had come to Rome from Paris, by Nice and Genoa, the previous night; but there was a general feeling that there was probably something wrong.

Why did she turn the back of her carriage to them and buy Parma violets?

In a little while, as the sun grew into a solemn red ball behind the purple dome, and the shadows became stinger, the throng began to go down the great winding airways towards the square below, where the waters fell from the marble mouths, and the grave sphinxes were couched beneath the drooping boughs.

A lady, wrapped in sealskin, with a sealskin hat set well over her brows, began to move also with the two persons who formed her escort. The trio was composed of Lady Joan Challoner, and her husband and the Prince Ioris.

"Is that Etoile?" said the Lady Joan eagerly, as the carriage dashed past them, and she caught the name spoken by some bystanders.

"Is that reely Etoile, now? Do tell," said a fashion-

able American of her acquaintance joining her, by name Mrs. Henry V. Clams.

"They say so. I've never seen her myself," answered Lady Joan. "Io, and I, and Mr. Challoner have just been to call on her, but she was out. She has brought me letters."

"Reely, now! How interestin'!" said the fashionable American. "Well, it's a very elegant turn out, now, aren't it? My word!——"

"You can get anything you like to pay for in Rome," said the Lady Joan with much contempt—she herself was on foot. "I must be civil to her. Voightel begs me to be so, and my father too; I must have her to dinner. Will you come, Mrs. Clams?"

"Oh, thanks, now; that's reel kind!" said Mrs. Henry V. Clams. "I'm dyin' to see her, dyin', and I've got a bet in N'York about the way she wears her hair. But they do say she's so rude, you know; Cyrus C. Butterfield—as works the Saratoga press, you know—wrote to ask her to send him every particular of her life from her baptism upwards, and would you believe it?—her secretary—a female, I believe—sent him back his own letter! There!"

The Lady Joan laughed shortly.

"I should say Cyrus C. Butterfield's inquiries would be particularly inconvenient to *her*! I wonder why on earth she has come to Rome!"

"Is there anything strange in coming to Rome?" said the Prince Ioris in his soft Roman tongue.

"No, of course no; what silly things you say! Only, of course she's got some motive. She's with Coronis too."

"The loveliest woman in Europe," said Mr. Challoner with solemnity and unction.

"Wretched creature," said the Lady Joan.

"My word, now, what *she's* up to?" inquired Mrs. Henry V. Clams with lively interest. "Why, she's Duchesse Santorin, aren't she?"

"And the Duke is going to divorce her."

"My! You don't say so!"

"Santorin is very thankless: she has paid his debts again and again," murmured the Prince Ioris.

"Oh, everybody that sings is an angel to you, Io!" said Lady Joan, with some irritation.

"If she's paid his debts, he's paid by the nose! Everybody knows what these professional women always are. I daresay Etoile herself is no better."

"My dear love," said Mr. Challoner with serious reproof, "surely you forget. Would your father ever——"

"My father's an ass where a petticoat's concerned, and he'd swear it had all the virtues inside it if it had only taken his fancy. He makes a great fuss about her; Voightel, too, who believes in nobody, believes in her. It's so queer! I suppose she's only sharper than most people."

"I never heard a word——" began the Prince Ioris.

"Stuff," said the Lady Joan, "there are heaps of stories—hideous stories. And there's no smoke without fire, that's certain. What day shall we ask her to dinner?"

"Well, now, I did read years ago, in our country, that she lived with a stoker as she'd taken a fancy to in the Lyons cars once," said Mrs. Henry V. Clams reflectively, searching into recesses of her memory.

Mr. Challoner and the Prince Ioris laughed outright.

"I never heard of the stoker, but I dare say there are things quite as fishy," said the Lady Joan. "What night shall we fix? Will the sixth suit you, Mrs. Clams?"

They sauntered on by the stone balustrades with the scattered groups, who were all making for the Corso, or walking under the Tempietto, Babuino-way, and who were all more or less talking of Etoile and of Dorotea Coronis.

The groups seldom said anything that was amiable of either, still less seldom anything that was true. But to be thus spoken of at all constitutes what the world calls Fame, and ever since the days of Horace the world has wondered that the objects of it are not more grateful for the distinction of detraction.

“Why do you spit?” says the glow-worm.

“Why do you shine?” says the frog.

CHAPTER III.

At the entrance of the Corso, Mr. Challoner recollected an appointment with a friend; his wife and the Prince Ioris strolled on down the Corso together.

It was the hour when the street was at its fullest and prettiest; the irregular casements were half-lighted, half-dark; the painted and gilded signs swung in the shadows; lamps hung above balconies draped with red; in a church doorway white priests were chanting with torches flickering; at the corners stood great baskets of violets and camellias, rose and white; knots of *pifferari* droned the wild, sad monotonies of the music of the hills; at a quick march a file of *bersaglieri*, with their plumes streaming, were coming up the narrow way as up a mountain pass; horses were trampling, drums were beating loud.

“I wonder how *you* will like Etoile, Io; you always do like queer people!” said the Lady Joan, as they

moved down into that picturesque chaos and luminous mingling of the night and day.

Her companion answered with gallant grace, "Whatever she is, she will be only for me—*la terza incommoda!*"

The Lady Joan laughed, well pleased, as she pushed her way through the lively and laughing crowds down to the Palazzo di Venezia. In an angle near the Ripresa dei Barberi, where two streets crossed one another in that populous and convenient locality, there was a small house squeezed between two grim palaces, and known as the Casa Challoner to the society and the tradespeople of Rome.

The Lady Joan climbed the stone stairs of the Casa Challoner with agility, and her companion followed with the accustomed matter-of-course air of a man who returns home.

The house was dusky, there was only one lamp lighted in the anteroom, but she pushed her way safely into a little chamber heavy with the smell of Turkish tobacco, and hung with Turkish stuffs, and fitted with Turkish couches.

On one of the divans the Prince Ioris cast himself a little wearily.

The Lady Joan lit a cigarette, stuck it between her teeth, cast aside her sealskins, and began to look over a pile of letters.

"I wish she hadn't come, bother her," she muttered, "Here's pages more eulogy from that old Tartar, Voightel. She seems to be perfection. I hate perfect people."

The Prince Ioris stretched himself out, and closed his eyes; his friend continued her examination of her correspondence. There was ten minutes' silence, only broken by the ticking of a Flemish chime-clock.

At the end of ten minutes Lady Joan looked up impatiently.

"Don't lie there, Io, doing nothing; tell me what we've got for next week, that I may settle this dinner."

He sighed, raised himself, and took out a set of tablets from his pocket.

"You have the English bishop and bishopess to-morrow."

"'Bishopess!' Well, go on."

"The Echéance soirée on the 3rd."

"Can't miss that. Well?"

"You take more English to the Opera on the 4th."

"*Après?*"

"Fifth, masked ball at the Greek Legation?"

"Sixth, Saturday?"

"Two teas—names English that I cannot pronounce."

"We'll throw over the teas. Sixth will do. Get some cards, and fill 'em up."

He obeyed, and went to a little writing-table.

"She's a sensational creature to have," continued his friend; "it's best to have her seen here first, before anybody else takes the cream off it. Whom shall we ask? Clever people they must be, and people that go in for that sort of thing. Ask Lady Cardiff; she won't mind if Etoile does startle the proprieties."

He filled in the card obediently; and she dictated some dozen other names to him, leaning over his shoulder as he wrote.

"Now fill in Etoile's," she said. "I'll send a little note with it, too, to be civil. That old beast Voightel and papa make such a fuss——"

"I cannot put—Etoile on the card?"

"Of course not. You must put Comtesse d'Avesnes. Did ever you hear such rubbish! And papa and Voightel believe in her, title and all."

"Why should they not?" said the writer, as he slid the cards into their envelopes.

The Lady Joan thrust her tongue in her cheek, and jumped a step of the hornpipe.

"As much countess as the cat! Now do draw that triptych that old Norwich wants so—make haste. We dine at seven, you know, because of the theatre. Send Anselmo with the notes to-morrow morning. Etoile's you might leave to-night. She's on your way home. I'll write her note now."

She crossed over to her bureau, and wrote a pretty epistle, which ended:

"Pray kindly waive ceremony, and come to us on Saturday; my dear father and so many of our common friends have spoken so much of you that I cannot even think of you as a stranger, and my husband will be as glad as I to have the honour of receiving Etoile in our Roman home."

Then she wrote another, which began:

"Dearest Voightel,—The hint of a wish of yours is a delight and a command to me; you know how I love and honour all genius," &c., &c.

Then she scampered through half-a-dozen more letters, with the pen of a ready writer; jumped up and crossed over to where her friend sat, sketching by the light of a reading-lamp, and ran her fingers through his soft dark hair.

"How slow you are, Io! You've only drawn one wing yet, and I've written fifteen letters."

That night the Prince Ioris, after escorting the Lady Joan to and from the broad fun of the Valle Theatre, walked through the white Roman moonlight, to his own little ancient palace in the street of the Ripetta, and

pausing, as he went, at the Hôtel de Russie, left the Lady Joan's note there for the Comtesse d'Avesnes.

"Etoile; it is a pretty name," he thought to himself; "whose star is she beside her own? A great artist, all the world knows; what else may she be, I wonder?"

Now, to wonder about any woman was a liberty and a luxury forbidden to him.

The key of his very thoughts hung to the girdle of the Lady Joan as she moved, and lay under the pillow of the Lady Joan as she slept—or she believed it did, which satisfied her quite as well.

CHAPTER IV.

WHO was Etoile?

The world in general said it as often as the crowd on the Pincio.

They never attended to what she said herself. Nobody wants facts. Facts are hardly more amusing than mathematics. Unless, indeed, they are the kind of facts that you can only just whisper under your breath. And of this kind of facts—the only kind that can in any way be diverting to others—the life of the great Belgian artist remained conspicuously, absurdly, inconsistently, and inconsiderately barren.

The world supplied the deficiency.

The world supplies you with history as our great tailor supplies us with dresses: he surveys our face and figure and selects for us what is appropriate. The world cuts out its gossip on the same judicious lines—whether you like what is given you is of no moment either to Worth or the world: you have got to wear it.

Be thankful that you are Somebody. Neither Worth

nor the world would trouble themselves to fit you if you were not.

In the morning Society that had been on the Pincio read in its papers that Etoile was in Rome on account of her health. Physicians had advised perfect repose and a warmer winter than Paris or Brussels can offer. Society read the paragraph, and putting down the papers wondered what the paragraph was meant to cover. Something, of course. Heaps of things, probably. Health indeed! What rubbish! Wasn't it a sculptor? No; money! Ah, money? Oh, indeed, much worse than *that*! Exile was *ordered*, quite *ordered* from the Elysée. You understand? Everybody whispered, nodded, seemed to understand, because nobody did understand in the least; and nobody, of course, could endure to look so ignorant.

When a name is on the public mouth the public nostril likes to smell a foulness in it. It likes to think that Byron committed incest; that Milton was a brute; that Raffaele's vices killed him; that Pascal was mad; that Lamartine lived and died a pauper, that Scipio took the treasury moneys; that Thucydides and Phidias stole; that Heloise and Hypatia were but loose women after all—so the gamut runs over twice a thousand years; and Rousseau is at heart the favourite of the world because he was such a beast, with all his talent.

When the world is driven to tears and prayers by Schiller it hugs itself to remember that he could not write a line without the smell of rotten apples near, and that when he died there was not enough money in his desk to pay his burial. They make him smaller, closer, less divine: the apples and the pauper's coffin.

Etoile kept no rotten apples by her, and the world sniffed in vain.

Had she worn men's clothes, travelled with a married duke, and had a caprice for a drunken painter, no doubt the world would have better understood her genius. As it was it felt exasperated, and thought her ostentatious.

After all, the innocence of a woman is no amusement whatever to anybody. It only gives nothing to be said about her. In any case, whenever the woman is celebrated, the world will not put up with nothing. It cuts out the garment of her history to its own fancy. It is like the great tailor; it knows better than she does what she ought to wear.

Etoile rose and strolled through the courts and galleries of the Vatican, unconscious, or indifferent of the babble that went on concerning her.

Society saw her servant and the big dog, Tsar, sitting outside with the Swiss Guard. It was almost inclined to think there must be something wrong with a Cardinal. What a nasty savage-looking creature that dog was!

At noon she went back to her hotel, found a few cards awaiting her, and at two o'clock was seen to be driving with the Princess Vera von Regonwalde, an ambassadress and a wit.

Princess von Regonwalde, or Princess Vera, as her friends called her by her pretty girlish title, was an Austrian by birth, and the wife of a Minister of another great Power, not Austrian. She was one of the loveliest women that ever brightened a court; she had a face like the Cenci, a walk like a young Diana's, a smile like a child's, a grace like a flower's, eyes like a fawn's, fancies like a poet's, and a form that Titian would have given to Venus. She had beautiful children, that clung round her in Correggio, like groups; and she always looked like

a picture, whether shining in velvet and cloth of gold in a throne-room, or straying in a linen dress through starlit myrtles on Italian hills. Princess Vera was a great social power; and when Society saw Etoile in her carriage it began to think that probably after all the paragraph was quite true; it began to recollect that it had always heard that this great artist's lungs were not very strong. And what a beautiful dog was the boarhound! Dear fellow, what was his name?

Mrs. Henry V. Clams, on the contrary, as she saw the Regonwalde carriage sweep by, said that it was right-down preposterous, and she didn't care who heard her.

Mrs. Henry V. Clams had passed the years of her youth in a Far West sawmill, in sewing-bees, washing-bees, blackberrying, and chapel-going, in the middle of a clearing, a good five hundred miles from any township; and she had, now that youth was fled from her, bloomed into an *élégante* in Europe, thanks to marvellous dishes, unlimited open house, politic lovers, and her husband's dollars, which were many.

Still, as an *élégante*, Mrs. Henry V. Clams never felt quite sure of her footing, and the night before, on the Pincio, at the sight of Etoile in dusky olive-hued velvet, entirely unornamented, she had had an uneasy conviction that she herself had too many buttons, too many colours, too many fringes, and had a bonnet too much like a firework, and that her Paris deity had been faithless to her and had arrayed her in raiment only fit for the "half-world," and the feeling rankled in her and made her say, "Preposterous!" snappishly, though she was a good-natured woman in the main.

Mrs. Henry V. Clams' countrywomen are received at all the Courts of Europe with no better qualification, very

often, than that nobody *does* know where they come from; and, did any ill-judged inquisitor seek to know, his investigations would very often lead him into many unsavoury dens of the Bowery and drinking-shops of "Frisco," into the shanty of many a ticket-of-leave man and the pawnshop of many a German Jew.

But it is a question that Mrs. Henry V. Clams and her countrywomen are very fond of asking; and indeed, *à propos* of their own countrywomen, they will always tell you with the utmost frankness that Mrs. Ulysses B. Washington once sold hot potatoes, and Mrs. Heloise W. Dobbs shot her first husband in St. Louis, and Miss Anastasia B. Spyrlé, betrothed to Prince Volterra, danced in tights throughout the States; or any other biographical trifle of the sort, with an impartiality scorning national bias.

"Nobody can't say where she came from," said Mrs. Henry V. Clams, drawing herself out a glass of Curaçoa from a little barrel of Baccarât glass in her own drawing-room. It was her day to receive.

"Nobody can't say where she came from," reiterated Mrs. Henry V. Clams with a kind of triumph.

"Who wants to know where artists come from? *I* don't," said Lady Joan Challoner, with a fine sentiment worthy of a great patron of the arts, which she was.

"When they stick to being artists, of course not," said Mrs. Henry V. Clams. "You don't see 'em then, and have no call to speak to 'em; but to think as Princess Vera, who, I'm sure, looks as if angels and empresses weren't good enough to black her shoes——"

"Princess Vera's art-mad," said the Lady Joan. "I love art myself, as you know, but still there are bounds to everything. Well, anyhow *I* must know her, so I'm

glad Princess Vera will keep me in countenance. Io, we ought to be going. What are you looking at there? Oh, a photograph of Etoile."

The Prince Ioris laid aside an album marked *Célébrités*, with a backward glance at the page he had opened it at, where he saw a mere profile like a white cameo on a dark ground, and the letters "Etoile" underneath it.

"Can one buy those portraits, madame?" he asked of his hostess as he hastened to follow the Lady Joan.

"Why, my! yes. That one's five francs. I think it's one of Goupil's," said Mrs. Henry V. Clams. "But it isn't much to look at; that one of Judic's, now, or Croisette's——"

But it was not Judic or Croisette that was in his fancy.

"Come along; take Spit," said the Lady Joan sharply, and threw a small blue Skye dog into his arms as they descended the broad Aubusson-covered staircase of the American's magnificent abode.

"That woman upstairs was quite right: it is preposterous," she continued. "But I thought I wouldn't say so, as we must know her now. Where are my furs? Take care."

The Prince Ioris, when in the streets, took advantage of a moment when the Lady Joan was engrossed in a shop in the Condotti cheapening a piece of china to go across to Sulpici's and order a photograph from Goupil's to be got for him.

The shopman answered with alacrity that he had one already. "In fact, we have several, Excellence. She is here, you know, and that always creates a demand," he said, dropping his voice.

Ioris bought the portrait, and slipped it inside his sable-lined coat.

"Where have you been, Io? I missed you a moment ago," said the Lady Joan angrily, having failed to cheapen the china, and feeling cross accordingly.

"I went to look if it rained. I was afraid you would get wet," he answered simply, and restored the serenity to her brows by buying the bowl for her.

It was a really charming piece of old Nankin.

"Etoile!" He said the word again to himself as he left his friend in her anteroom, happy with her bowl, and went to his own house to dress for dinner. The name had a fascination for him. He looked at the photograph by the light of the lamps as he walked, and when he reached his own house put it away in a secret drawer. He had here and there a secret drawer of which the Lady Joan did not possess the secret.

The subject of his thoughts, and of the portrait, had been called Etoile as long as she could remember; the peasant folks calling her so because in her childhood she ran so fast, and her long fair hair streamed after her so far, that she looked like a shooting star as she flew by them in the summer nights in green Ardennes.

To the world in general the name seemed strange, suspicious, uncomfortable, indicative of that string of asterisks on a page which replaces what is too shocking to be printed. But to her it had all the old familiar charm of a sound that bears all childhood in it.

The first thing that she could remember was a sunny village in the woods on the banks of the bright Meuse water, in the heart of that sweet green country of Jaques and Rosalind which, for some things, has no equal upon earth.

Few places on the earth are lovelier than the province through which the bright Meuse wanders, and the first memories of Etoile were of its glancing waters, its wooded

hills, its rich grass-meadows, its noble forest trees, its gabled houses, grey and black with time, its broad yellow roads, leading westward to France and eastward to the Rhine. There are a breadth, a graciousness, a fresh and fragrant verdure in all this country not to be surpassed in charm; it is unworn and unspoilt; and although under its leafy woods the wheel of the gambler turns, and by its limpid springs the tired hypochondriac drinks, still there is much of it that neither gambler nor hypochondriac ever sees, and that is solitary as Suabian or Pennine Alp, and radiant with a brightness all its own.

The beautiful rapid river, foaming by mill and weir; and the hayfields, with their grand elms and walnuts; and the high hills where the pines grew, and the one little sunny paved street, with the village fountain at the end, where the women gossiped and the big belled horses drank—these were the first things on which the eyes of Etoile had opened, and made the first pictures that her mind remembered. A brown-frocked monk, a grey-frocked nun, a cowherd with his cattle, a wagon with its team, a group of women with their burden of linen going to the washing-places in the river—these were all that passed up and down the hilly road between the double row of tall bird-filled aspens; the little place was sunny, sleepy, very still, but it was lovely, bosomed deep in fragrant woods, and watered by the Meuse.

And then what a world of wonders lay around!—the primroses, the blue jays, the leaping trout, the passing boats, the foxes that stole out almost familiarly, the squirrel swinging in the nut thickets of the hills, the charcoal-burners coming down rough and black to tell tales of the bears and wolves high up above, the great Flemish cart-horses walking solemnly in state caparison outward on the highroads to France or Prussia, the red

lurid glow far away in the evening sky, which told where the iron-blasters of stern, fierce Liège were at work—these were wonders enough for a thousand years, or at least for a young child to think them so.

Etoile thought so, and her childhood went by like a fairy tale told by a soft voice on a summer day.

The house she lived in was very old, and had those charming conceits, those rich shadows, that depth of shade, that play of light, that variety, and that character which seem given to a dwelling-place in ages when men asked nothing better of their God than to live where their fathers had lived, and leave the old rooftree to their children's children.

The thing built yesterday, is a caravanserai: I lodge in it to-day, and you to-morrow; in an old house only can be made a home, where the blessings of the dead have rested and the memories of perfect faiths and lofty passions still abide.

This house stood in a green old shady garden, and at the end of the garden the trees hung over the beautiful river. Etoile used to think that in just such a garden must have passed the long slumbers of the Sleeping Beauty. All happy childhood is like an April morning, but hers was beyond most children's happy by reason of its simplicity, its unclouded peace, and the fair, gay, shapeless dreams that were with it always like light golden clouds about the sun.

There were sadness and mystery near, but neither were allowed to touch her. She only knew peace and joy. If she had been told that she had dropped from the stars on a midsummer night she would have believed it quite easily: no healthy child's life will ever wonder whence it comes or whither it drifts. It is enough for it that it *is*.

This is the one felicity that the innocence of infancy and the trance of passion share in common. The immediate moment is the heaven alike of the child and of the lover.

She was very happy always in this, her green birth-country, by the river-side.

But she was never happier than when she went out of the sweet summer sunshine, from the murmur of the street fountain, and from the smell of the blossoming orchards into the quiet dusky den that was her study and bent her curls over the ponderous tomes and the intricate exercises with which her tutors delighted in trying her patience and her powers.

Out of doors she was the merest child, happy in all a child's pleasure of new-born days and new-found berries, and new-made cakes, of the old swing in the sycamore, and the first swallow, that showed summer, and the promise of a long day in the woods to bring home violets, or any other of the many simple things which made her childhood beautiful.

She knew the whereabouts of every rare wild flower; she knew every bird that haunted the woods or the streams; she was friends with all the peasant folk, and would find their stray sheep for them and tame the dogs they were afraid of; she loved the wind and the wild weather as she loved the heat that uncurled the carnation-buds, and the still moonshine when the nightingales sang in the orchards; she was not dismayed if evening fell as she ran alone down a lone hill-side, or if she bore down through the swift wild rain like a little white boat through a surging sea; she had the love of nature of a German and the unconsciousness that she loved it of a Greek.

"*Tu es folle,*" said her old teacher to her because she laughed and cried for joy to see the first primrose break

out of the bleak brown earth, and kneeled down and kissed the flower, and told it how glad the birds would be, and would not to have saved her life have taken it away from its shelter of green leaves. "*Tu es folle*," said the old teacher—it is what the world always says to the poet.

In the forests on the Meuse river there lived an old man who did not tell her she was foolish. He was a German, who had been a noted artist in his day, until paralysis of his right arm by some accident had put an end to his career and his hopes of fame. He was sad and alone; was harsh of temper and taciturn; but he took a fancy to this child who was always out of doors trying to learn the secrets of the clouds' movements and the waters' hues, and he guided aright her passionate instincts towards the arts. By the time she was fifteen she had created things that the old master thought more marvellous than he would confess to her. She painted all the day in the open air, on the hills and by the torrents; she studied all the evenings and half the night. She was perfectly happy.

There was another world, of course, where the hay-wagons went and the barges glided down the river; but she wanted no other.

Now and then there would come to the black-and-white house on the river a person for whom the ways of the house were changed, and who was always whispered of in words of awe by the village people. He would kiss her carelessly, bid her do a problem or write a poem, stay a few days, and go. She was told that he was her father—the Count Raoul d'Avesnes.

In the old fighting days the Counts d'Avesnes had been a fierce and mighty race, reigning in lofty regions of the wild Ardennes, Catholics always, and warriors

rather than courtiers. Little by little, in strife and conspiracy, and internecine wars, they had lost their lands and greatness, until little save their traditions were left in modern times. This, their sole living representative, was a man of many ambitions, of no achievement. A political gamester, a political conspirator, his life was spent in the treacherous seas of political intrigue, and he at the last perished in their whirlpool. Little was known of him—by his daughter almost nothing. He had broken his wife's heart and spent her money. His own death was mysterious, like his life. He passed away and made no sign.

There is so much mystery in this world, only people who lead humdrum lives will not believe it.

It is a great misfortune to be born to a romantic history. The humdrum always think that you are lying. In real truth romance is common in life, commoner, perhaps, than the commonplace. But the commonplace always look more natural.

In nature there are millions of gorgeous hues to a scarcity of neutral tints; yet the pictures that are painted in sombre semi-tones and have no one positive colour in them are always pronounced the nearest to nature. When a painter sets his palette, he dares not approach the gold of the sunset and dawn or the flame of the pomegranate and poppy. Etoile's short story had this gold and red in it, and so no one believed in it any more than they do in the life-likeness of Turner's Hesperides.

She, a happy and thoughtful child, lived in the little Ardennes village with her mother's mother, and her two old servants, and knew nothing of all this heritage of wonder and of woe. Occasionally the wonderful person who was called her father came and brought a wonderful breath of the outer air with him. That was all she knew.

One day his shadow passed for the last time up the sunny street between the aisles of aspen and was seen no more there ever after, and his letters ceased, and silence fell upon his fate; and in time they came to know that he was dead and she was the last that lived of the once famous race of the Counts d'Avesnes.

It scarcely seemed strange to her—she had always known so little.

He had been a black bead in the golden rosary of her happy childhood; she barely missed it when it dropped.

In after-years people would never believe that Etoile, beyond the fact of the patrician name she bore, had known so little; they forgot how completely natural and matter-of-course the strangest circumstances seem to one who has been rocked in them, as it were, in a cradle from birth upward.

Her father had come and gone, come and gone, as comets do. He ceased to come; it did not seem strange.

She studied in the big books, and strayed about in the chesnut woods and orchards, and lived in her own fancies more than in anything around her. Vague desires would oftentimes touch her, as she used to stand on the brow of the reaped fields, and watch the sun go down, red and beautiful against the dusky masses of the far-off woods. But they were desires whose wings were still folded; like those of fledgling birds' that flutter a little way through the green leaves, and then are frightened at their dreams of flight.

For the rest, her grandmother and the old servants took all care of things bodily and temporal. Etoile was free to think and dream and study.

The treasures of scholarship are sweet to all who open them. But they are perhaps sweetest of all to a

girl that has been led both by habit and by nature to seek them.

The soul of a girl whilst passions sleep, desires are unknown, and self-consciousness lies unawakened, can lose itself in the impersonal as no male student can. The mightiness and beauty of past ages become wonderful and all-sufficient to it, as they can never do to a youth beset by the stinging fires of impending manhood. The very element of faith and of imagination, hereafter its weakness, becomes the strength of the girl-scholar. The very abandonment of self, which later on will fling her to Sappho's death, or mure her in the cell of Heloise, will make her find a cloudless and all-absorbing happiness in the meditations of great minds, in the myths of heroic ages, in the delicate intricacies of language, and in the immeasurable majesties of thought. The evil inseparable from all knowledge will pass by her unfelt; the greatness only attainable by knowledge will lend her perfect and abiding joys.

Whilst they were only scholars be sure that Sappho and Heloise were calmer and more glad than any other women; it was when they looked up from the written page to the human face that their woes surpassed all others'—because beyond all others' was their loss.

A year after the tidings of the Comte d'Avesnes' death had come to the Ardennes, her grandmother, reflecting that at her death the child would be solitary, with a slender patrimony and a name whose past nobility was of no present use, resolved to sacrifice her own peace and move to a great city.

They went to Paris, leaving the green Meuse waters and those bright woodland villages that lie out of the beaten track and are so still and fresh and charming. Etoile sobbed bitterly: yet she was full of ecstatic wonder

and hope. She forgot that thousands have had such hope before her, and had only perished miserably in the vast press of life. If youth did not thus forget, maturity would have no fame to record.

They made their home in a nook of old Paris within sight of the trees of the Luxembourg. A tumult of great ideas and vague ambitions was in the mind of the child who had studied more than many men, and had the poetry of many nations all alive within her.

In the city of pleasure Etoile uninterruptedly pursued both art and study. Friends they had but few; those few were of the proud impoverished families of a nobility that had nothing left except its traditions of honour; and such as these thought the pursuit of art a degradation.

One day Etoile, however, made a friend of her own. Chances brought her across the path of an old man whose name was very glorious to her: a great master whose genius had been nurtured amidst the mighty storms of the First Empire. The old man looked long in silence at her, the harsh lines of his face softening and changing; then he turned to her and uncovered his white head.

"My sun has long set," he said; "I rejoice to see yours rise."

The word of David Israels was still a law in Paris and all the worlds of art. He kept her secret and sent her first picture to the Salon himself.

"One of my pupils" was all he would say when questioned as to the painter.

The picture was only the study of a gleaner returning by sunset over naked fields; but it had an instant and unquestioned success. It was followed by greater and stronger works signed "Etoile."

The pictures were for some few years always thought

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to be the creations of a man, were treated as such; and when the rumour was first current that the painter was a woman—a girl—the great world of Paris laughed aloud in derision and utter disbelief.

Their force, their depth of tone, their anatomical accuracy, and above all their profound melancholy, made it impossible—so they said.

Nevertheless the world, which has lived to see many impossible things pass into the limbo of incontestable facts, lived to see this pass also.

“It is time they should know the truth,” said David Israels, and told it. Etoile regretted that it should be told: to the pure ambitions of the true artist creation is paradise, but the praise of the crowd seems profanity.

But David Israels had not had his own way unresisted for two-thirds of a century to consider such a trifle as anyone’s personal desires.

He made the truth known, and within a year or two she sprang at once into the fierce light that beats upon a throne—the contested and bitterly begrudged throne of genius.

David Israels lived long enough to see her triumphs—not long enough to protect her from the dark shadows that slink in the path of all triumphs. Etoile became a name on the tongues of all Paris, and so on all the tongues of the world. She had a fame as great and as pure as is possible in this age, when fame is too often awarded by the mere screams of the vulgar. To her house in the Paris winters came many of the greatest men of her time. She influenced them much more than they influenced her. She had a life that was brilliant and rich in all fruits of the intellect.

As recreations of her leisure she wrote a comedy in verse which had a tumultuous success on a great stage,

and some poems were printed in great reviews, all signed "Etoile." "She has all the talents," said the world angrily. If she had only had all the vices too the world would not, perhaps, have minded so much.

Unfortunately for her reputation, no one could find out that she had as much as one vice. Few women could boast of being her friend, but no man could boast of being her lover.

Ten years had now gone by since she left the Meuse river; they had been ten years of brilliancy if not of happiness. Genius is seldom happy—except in its dreams or the first hours of its love.

With a woman, the vulgarity that lies in public adulation is apt to nauseate; at least if she be so little of a woman that she is not vain, and so much of one that she cares for privacy. For the fame of our age is not glory but notoriety; and notoriety is to a woman like the bull to Pasiphæ—whilst it caresses it crushes.

Fame brought Etoile its sweet and bitter fruits together.

"That is Etoile," said everyone when she passed by. People who creep by in obscurity think this notice from mankind must be paradise.

All at once she grew tired of the brilliant success that surrounded her; it seemed tame, stupid, a twice-told tale. "Oh! old world, have you nothing better?" she said thanklessly to the world which had been too prodigal of its laurels to her.

She lost zest in it all. A cough settled on her lungs. When her physicians bade her rest and go to Italy she was glad.

They said she had caught cold from working in clay. She had had that desire to create something excellent in sculpture which comes to most true painters; but her

malady was not due to cold or clay; it was rather the fatal revenge entailed on any mortal who has exiled the passions and the affections, and who will sicken for them unconsciously; the most splendid structure of the intellect will always have this danger at its base.

CHAPTER V.

ON the night when the Prince Ioris took the little three-cornered note of his friend to the Comtesse d'Avesnes the note was carried upstairs to a large *salon* on the first floor, of which the windows were standing open, giving to view the masses of trees on the Pincio and the Medici gardens and the brilliant stars of a winter's night. The naked and tawdry splendour of an hotel apartment was redeemed by masses of flowers that the present occupants of it had brought there—pale violets, snowy camellias, and early narcissi, born under glass, and showing their tender heads coyly, as if cold.

Against one of the open casements leaned Etoile, wrapped in her furs—for the night was chilly—looking at the stars of Orion, which had arisen above the dark lines of the ilex trees, and listening to the fall of the fountain water in the square below.

She was fair of skin, and in form slender and supple, from living much out of doors and taking much exercise in the saddle and on foot; she had bright-hued hair that was lifted a little from her forehead, and eyes like the eyes of the boyish portrait of Shelley; her velvet skirts fell to her feet in the simple undulating folds that Leonardo da Vinci loved to draw. People were vaguely disappointed when they saw her; they would have liked her better in a man's coat, with her hair cut short, and

generally odd and untidy-looking. An artist that you might by accident mistake for a duchess is annoying.

"What are you thinking of, Etoile?" said her companion, who was that wonderfully beautiful woman, brilliant as a pomegranate flower or a sapphire, who was at once Dorotea Coronis and the wife of the Duc de Santorin.

"I believe I was thinking of Actea."

From the hotel she could see the dark masses of the trees on the Pincio, and the round dome of the church raised to lay the unholy spirit of Nero to rest.

"Poor Actea! The slave-girl redeems the age she lived in—"

"Rich Actea! happy Actea!" said Dorotea Coronis, with a sigh. "Her beast was god to her. She never saw him as he was. No doubt she thought him too a great artist and a perfect poet. Love is blind."

"Not the highest love, surely."

"What do you know about it? You love nothing but your art."

"That is Voightel's complaint."

"Voightel is quite right. Why have you never cared for any man, Etoile?"

"Cared? Men are so admirable as friends; when they speak of warmer things than friendship they weary or they revolt me; I lose my regard for them and my patience with them. It is hard to give a reason for these things."

"You are fortunate to be so cold."

"Is it coldness? And is it fortunate? I am not so certain."

"Whatever it is, it makes you many foes. You seem to say to men, 'You are too stupid to succeed,' and to women, 'I am stronger than you.'"

"I do not mean to say anything of the kind. It is true most people tire me. There is so little profundity in them, and one reads them so soon. A new acquaintance is like a new novel: you open it with expectation, but what you find there seldom makes you care to take it off the shelf a second time."

"I am glad I am an old friend."

Etoile smiled.

"Oh! old friends are our Homers and Horaces, our Shakespeares and Molières: we cannot read them too often, and we find something in them to suit all our moods. Why will you go away from me, dear Dorotea?"

The Duchesse Santorin laughed a little wearily.

"My dear! when M. le Duc must have two hundred thousand francs as his New Year's *étrennes*! You forget I am not my own mistress, and the Petersburg engagement was signed this time last year."

"I would give him no more. Surely your marriage contract protects you a little?"

"Entirely. But only *so* can I purchase his absence. He has outraged me in every kind of way, but he has not lost his legal rights. He never struck me before witnesses; and though he had mistresses all over Europe he did not bring one under the same roof with me. You see he is blameless."

The lovely dark face of the great Spanish singer grew weary and full of scorn; she rose and walked to and fro the room restlessly.

"I wish you were not going to Russia," said her friend, in a low tone, leaving the open window.

The Duchesse Santorin looked up quickly and paused in her rapid and passionate walk.

"You think I shall meet Fédor. You mistake. He has left the Imperial Guard and had himself ordered to

the Caucasus by my wish. He is there, and he will be there all winter."

"But who will believe that?"

"It does not matter what is believed. It matters what *is*."

"To ourselves and the God we hope for—yes."

"And what else matters? When we are 'in the light that beats upon a throne' we are at once condemned unheard—for Envy and Mediocrity sit on the judgment-seat, and whenever did they wait for truth?"

In brave old Cordova, twenty years before, a tiny child with some gitaña blood in her had danced the *zaronga* with twinkling feet whenever a castanet clicked or a tambourine sounded—a child so beautiful that when her father, a picador, lay dying in the sand of the bull-ring he kissed her on the eyes and said, "Though I go where I shall see the faces of the children of God, there will be no face so fair amongst them as my Dorotea's."

She was only five years old then, but she never afterwards forgot the circle of sand, the stream of blood, the sea of faces, the great dead bull, the dying man whose last breath was a kiss to her.

His brethren of the tribe, unasked, took the burden of her, shared between them the cost of her small wants, and housed her safely with good women, and even had her well taught by a priest; or taught, at least, as much as it is ever thought a Spanish girl can want to know apart from her lore of fan and rosary. The little Dorotea danced in every *patio* where the guitar was sounding, and sang in every church where the litanies were chaunting—a wild, gay, most lovely child; proud, too—so proud that the Cordovans would say to one another that perhaps the fables were true which had given to the picador the blood of an old kingly stock.

When she was growing a little out of childhood some one travelling through Cordova chanced to see and hear her sing.

The traveller was an old Jew whose errand in life was to find great singers for great theatres. He was an honest man and virtuous, though he loved money. He persuaded her protectors to sell him the little Dorotea. He took her away with him, and dealt gently with her, training her wonderful powers aright, and letting her know and hear nothing to her hurt. At sixteen she sang in Italy, at seventeen in Paris. She had one of the purest voices that had been ever heard upon the stage, and her marvellous beauty and brilliancy made her fame even more than her voice. Dorotea Coronis was one of the wonders of the world. She had reached as great heights of perfection as any singer can, and every note that fell from her lovely lips brought a shower of gold.

Amongst her countless lovers came the Duc de Santorin, *Pair de France*, with his heart and his *couronne* in his hand, to lay at her feet. For it was well known that, to be won, she must be wooed, with due honour. After some reluctance and long refusal she became his wife. His passion for herself was hot but brief; his passion for her golden harvests lasted.

The pride in her which the people of Cordova had seen in the baby dancing the *zaronga* in their courts and gardens made the dignity and ancientness of his name allure her. She had no love for him, but neither had she any dislike. Those about her urged and persuaded her.

"I do not care for you, but you never shall be ashamed of me," she said to him.

He swore gratitude and devotion. He did not keep his word, but she kept hers.

She had now been Duchesse de Santorin for some

years, singing in all the cities of Europe to supply his demands, and with a right to a *tabouret* at the Court of France whenever Court of France there might be. The contrast sometimes made her laugh as she had used to laugh above her tambourine in the *patios* of old Cordova, only not with the same mirth. For five years they had been virtually separated, though still nominally of good accord. She had kept her word to him—she had been faithful. But of course the world did not think so.

Men were in love with her wherever her beautiful gazelle-like eyes rested, wherever her pure lark-like voice penetrated. The world knew very well that some of these—oh, yes, of course—and the world was inclined to pity the Duc de Santorin.

“She was a gitaña, you know, a gipsy; a little bare-legged, brazen thing, telling fortunes and rolling in the mud,” said the world feminine, jealous of that sovereign grace and that incomparable art which Heaven had given to Dorotea Coronis.

Meanwhile there were many who loved and honoured her, and amongst them was Etoile.

They had become friends at the house of a famous Minister one night in Paris, after a representation of the “*Flauto Mágico*,” and their friendship had endured.

“But the Caucasus,” said Etoile this evening, “the Caucasus is not so very far that men cannot come back from it. Are you sure that Count Souroff——”

“Will do what I wish him? Yes.”

“No; I meant rather you of your own strength. When you are in his own country, when you know him amidst a half-savage people, in sickness and peril, wounded even, perhaps;—can you be sure that you will not yourself recall him?”

"Yes, I am sure. Because my resolve is for his sake, not my own. Listen, Etoile."

She paused in her feverish movements to and fro the great chamber and stood before her friend.

"A woman who thinks for herself is weak, but the woman who thinks for another is strong. I will not let Fédor Souroff be my lover because I adore him with all my heart, all my soul, all my life. I am a Spanish woman if I am anything; I have fire, not water, in my veins; I have no duties towards my husband, because he has insulted me, robbed me, outraged me, beaten me, and told me a hundred times a year that I am only his bank, which he honours only too much by plunging his hand into it to seize its gold; only his mechanical nightingale, of which he keeps the key, with the title to wind it up and set it singing when he wills; or break it if it fail to sing. And yet—yet I will not be what they say I am to the man whom I worship, and who thinks holy the very stones or sand that feel my feet, and gives to me the noblest, tenderest, most loyal love that was ever given to a woman for her joy and pain. I will not—for his sake——"

"For his?"

"For his. You have seen him so little, else you would know why without asking. In the first place, Santorin would shoot him dead. Santorin is base, but not so base as to sink to the *cocu content* of the modern world;—and Fédor would let Santorin shoot him. That would be what he would call only just. But this is the least thing. Fédor would gladly die so to purchase one hour with me. What would be far worse for him would be to live. What man is more wretched on earth than the bond slave of another man's wife? Fédor is young; he has a great name, he comes of a great family, who

adore him; he is a fearless and devoted soldier. I will not ruin him—I will not. He would break his career for me; he would incur exile, confiscation, even the shame of a deserter for me; yes, and adore me the more because I doomed him to them. I will not take his sacrifice. My love, my love!—he is but mortal. He will not love for ever thus; not when love is but another name for disappointment. Men are not like us. In time he will forget me; he will be free; he will be happy.”

She ceased suddenly; a convulsion of violent weeping passed through her; she threw herself prostrate on a couch and buried her beautiful head in her hands.

Etoile looked at her with tears in her own eyes; she forbore to speak; she knew that all the passionate, proud, and vehement nature of Dorotea Coronis was centred in this great passion, whose temptations it yet had strength to resist.

The windows were open and the stars shone in the dark; the sound of the fountains below came on the silence with the dull rumbling of the night traffic of Rome; the air was sweet and heavy with the smell of forced heliotrope with which they had filled a large bowl on a marble table.

“To love like that!” thought Etoile. “It must be worth even all that pain.”

And for the first time in her life she felt solitary.

At that moment the servant brought her the note from the Casa Challoner and a bouquet of white flowers, lilies of the valley and camellias, which the Prince Ioris had purchased in the flower-shop of the Via Condotti as he passed in the moonlight, and sent up with his own card, on one of those unthinking impulses which sometimes imperilled all his prudence.

“What sweet lilies!” said Etoile, and forsook the stars

for them, bending her face over their fragrance. Flowers were her earliest loves, and had never been displaced in her affections. Then she opened the Lady Joan's letter.

A few evenings before, in Paris, Voightel, shrewdest, keenest, and most merciless of wits and men, had been to bid her farewell:

"Go and see Archie's daughter, since he wishes it; go and see my Lady Joan," had said the great Voightel—traveller, philologist, past-master in all sciences and all tongues, standing on her hearth, and glowering through his green spectacles, and his grizzled beard, till he looked like a magnified and cynical tom-cat. "I have often talked to Joan of you. What is she like? Not a whit like Archie, but a handsome woman, and a clever woman in her way, which is not your way. Mérimée calls her his *pétroleuse*. It is inexact. *Pétroleuses* burn with no idea of ultimate booty; she would never waste her oil so. Cleopatra crossed with Dame du Comptoir were nearer, I think. I admire her very much. I always know she is lying, and yet I am always pleased when she lies to please me. How contemptible! But all men are weak. I am inclined to respect women who *live* every hour of their lives. She does. You do not. You dream too much ever to live very vividly, unless you ever fall in love. I do so wish you would. It would make you so many friends. Men dislike a woman who will not be wooed. Believe that, my disdainful Etoile, who will be wooed by nobody. When a woman is "kind" to various men, each favoured mortal is bound, in honour, to arm *cap-à-pié* and swear she never was "kind" to anybody. Whereas, when she repulses and rebuffs them all round as you do, her lovers become her enemies, and will be more than human if they do not take her character away, out of the sincerity of their conviction that somebody must have

been beforehand with them. Reasoning by analogy, I have very little doubt that Faustina was a wife of remarkable purity, and St. Agnes and Agatha very little better than they should have been. Go and see our dear Joan. She is a faggot of contradictions; extraordinarily ignorant, but naturally intelligent; audacious, yet timid; a bully, but a coward; full of hot passions, but with cold fits of prudence. Had she your talent the world would have heard of her. As it is, she only enjoys herself. Perhaps the better part. Fame is a cone of smoke. Enjoyment is a loaf of sugar. I am not sure what she is doing in Rome, but I am quite sure she is in mischief, and quite sure she is making money. When the moon on the Forum has filled your brain with *schwärmerei*, go and see Joan. She is an admirable tonic for all poets. She will be the Prose of Rome for you. You will want prose there."

CHAPTER VI.

AT eight o'clock, on the sixth of December, Etoile, Comtesse d'Avesnes, went up the many stairs of the Casa Challoner, to see for the first time the woman who was to be to her the Prose of Rome.

She herself was tired, and had little colour; she wore no jewels, and had only a knot of pale yellow tea-roses at her breast; her dress trailed softly, it was made up of black Chantilly laces, and pale maize hues, and the deftest hands of Paris had cast the easy and simple grace of it together.

She went carelessly, indifferently, wondering if she should like these people as much as she liked Lord Archie; went to her fate as everyone does, unwitting that

in the commonplace passage of the hours Destiny was striking.

As she entered the anteroom, and laid aside her furs, she heard a voice singing a *ritornello* of the Roman populace, to the deep dulcet chords of a mandoline.

As her name was announced the voice ceased, and from between two curtains of Oriental silk, that shaded the inner doorway, there advanced, with outstretched hands, the singer, clad in black velvet, with a little collar of diamond stars at her throat, which sparkled as she moved. She had a classic head, fitly shaped for a bust of Athene, an Egyptian profile, brilliant eyes, green by day, black by night, thick eyebrows, and a cordial smile, that showed very white and even teeth.

"How charmed I am! At last we meet! How many many times I have tried to see you in Paris and Brussels!" cried the Lady Joan, with eager welcome, and with honest warmth.

"Your father's daughter can be nothing but my friend," answered her new acquaintance, with sincerity.

Lady Joan, her guitar still in one hand, led her guest with animated and eager compliment to the hearth; pushed a low chair nearer the wood fire, said some pretty words of her own father, and of their dear old Voightel, asked after other friends they had in common, spoke of the weather, and then, as by a mere careless after-thought, or accident, turned suddenly and presented a person who had all the while been standing close by, erect, calm, and unnoticed, like a lord in waiting beside a throne.

"Prince Ioris—the Comtesse d'Avesnes. Ioris is a great friend of my husband's, his dearest friend, indeed. Oh, of course, he has heard of *you*. Who has not?"

Only, of course, too, he knows you best as Etoile. We all do that. It is such a charming name!"

The Prince Ioris looked like a picture, and bowed like a courtier, and, leaning his arm on the mantelshelf, began to speak graceful nothings, in his melodious voice.

At that moment there entered, a little hurriedly, like an actor not on the stage in time for his cue, the gentleman with the Scotch face and the German manner, whom Lady Joan, with a little frown on her darkling brows, presented as Mr. Challoner.

Mr. Challoner, the excellence of whose countenance was its unalterability under all circumstances whatever, stared through his eye-glass, bent himself stiffly, and in solemn phrase assured his guest of the supreme honour that he felt she had done to his threshold.

Immediately upon him there followed another of his guests, Mrs. Henry V. Clams, gorgeous in a gown that imprisoned her so tightly that it only permitted of the garb of a circus rider underneath it, and weighty with a perfect Golconda of rubies.

"No stones on her!—my word, and she must have got lots!" reflected Mrs. Henry V. Clams, staring at the tea-roses of Etoile, and settling in her own mind that artists were the most disappointin' people to look at, except princes, that ever she saw.

She was accompanied by the Marquis de Fontebranda, a Piedmontese about the Court, a fair, graceful, and good-looking man, who had trained her in the way she should go, and still suffered many things from her love of colours and her need of dictionaries. Her husband had been invited, of course, but it was understood everywhere that he never came anywhere; he had always a cold, or letters in from N'York. Fontebranda had trained him as well.

The other guests arrived—an English Chief Justice, famous for his wit; a lady known to all Europe as the Marchioness of Cardiff, some Italians, some Russians; finally, a mature pet of the Lady Joan's, a white-haired and cosmopolitan Englishman, by name Silverly Bell, who was a most popular person at all the English tea-parties of the Continent, for nobody sugared your tea more prettily, or told you nastier stories of your neighbours more sweetly.

Dinner announced, Fontebranda was allotted to Etoile, Mr. Challoner offered his arm to Lady Cardiff, and the hostess went in with Mr. Challoner's dearest friend.

"What do you think of her, Io?" she murmured in his ear.

"*Pas grand' chose!*" he murmured back indifferently, with a little shrug of his shoulders.

The Lady Joan's grey-green eyes sparkled happily. She believed him.

The dinner was well appointed, quiet, and unpretentious; the dishes were not too numerous, and were all good; the flowers were in old Faenza bowls; the china was old white and gold Ginori, the glass Venetian, the fruit superb. All went well, and there was only one discord, the voice of Mrs. Henry V. Clams, but that is a kind of discord which in the present construction of society is to be heard everywhere, from mountain-tops to throne-rooms.

Mrs. Henry V. Clams thought again and again what "disappointin' people" artists were.

Etoile chanced to say very little.

Sometimes in society she was very silent, sometimes very eloquent. Minds like hers resemble running brooks: they reflect what they pass through; they are still or

sparkling, dark or radiant, according as they flow over sand or moss, under black cloud or sunny sky: the brook is always the same; it is what it mirrors that varies.

Mrs. Henry V. Clams—who herself was quite independent of circumstance or surroundings, and whose torrents of questions and bubbles of curiosity and chatter never ceased on any occasion, and never had been known to cease, except once at a Drawing-room in London, and once at a total eclipse of the sun, on both of which occasions she had owned to being “that cowed she was right down mum”—stared at Etoile across the table, and said to her next neighbour, that “surely there was nothing like clever people for being daft.”

Her neighbour being the English Chief Justice, a very clever and merry person himself, assented heartily to the proposition, but begged her to reflect.

“My dear lady, if talent weren’t a little daft as you say, how on earth would the great majority ever be got to stand it at all? Consider the enormous utility of genius looking now and then like a fool.”

Mrs. Henry V. Clams stuffed her mouth with a *bouchée*, and smiled vaguely. She did not understand, and Fontebranda was too far off to be telegraphed to for explanations.

“If that *be* Etoile, why don’t she talk and amuse us?” mused meanwhile, like Mrs. Henry V. Clams, a very different person, the Marchioness of Cardiff, whose heart and soul had been bequeathed to her unaltered from an ancestress of the days of Louis XIV., and who never could see why artists wanted Christian burial, or were asked to dinner, or any of that sort of thing.

“Is that really Etoile, did you say? *the* Etoile, you know?” she asked of her host.

"Yes, yes," assented Mr. Challoner, not being certain whether he ought to be very triumphant over his guest, or somewhat ashamed of her. "Dear Lord Archie is fond of her—begged us to do what we could—you know his good nature—my wife inherits it. Dear Lady Cardiff, do try these larded quails."

"She looks a much better bred one than you do, my dear sir," thought her ladyship, withdrawing her eyeglass from Etoile to the quails.

"You said you liked to meet celebrities—that it amused you," said her host, with an accent of apology in his voice. "Of course, of her great genius there can be no question."

"Of course, of course! and I am charmed," said her ladyship, occupied with her first mouthful of a larded quail. "Tell her to come to my Mondays. I'll tell her myself after dinner. She's very well dressed. Is it Worth?"

"Most likely; she is said to be extravagant."

"I am sure she has a right to be; how nice it must be to make your own money, and spend it, and never be bothered with trustees! Oh yes, Worth, beyond any doubt. The way he ties a bow one never can mistake. And just that tea-rose too—very pretty, very pretty indeed. What different things he gives people he likes, to what he will do for mere millionaires like our dear Mrs. Henry V. Clams."

Etoile, unconscious of the criticism, ruffled the tea-roses amongst her old lace, divided her few words between Fontebranda and a Count Serge Roublezoff who sat on the other side of her, looked often at her hostess, whose bright eyes flashed back honest kindly smiles to hers, and, without knowing very well why she did so, watched the man whom Lady Joan had installed in the seat of honour.

He was very tall and slender, with that look of distinction which, though not always attendant on a great race, is never found outside it; he had high delicate features, and an oval beardless face, a soft olive skin, thoughtful pensive brows, and those eyes which at once allure and command women; he had a beautiful voice, infinite grace and softness of manner, and in aspect might have stepped down off any canvas of Velasquez or Vandyke. Etoile noticed that he was scrupulously alive to every want of the Lady Joan's; he bowed his head in resigned silence, whenever she contradicted him, which she did twice in every five minutes; he called her Madame with the strictest ceremony, and addressed Mr. Challoner across the length of the table as "mon cher," with more friendly effusion than seemed needful, on more occasions than were natural. Occasionally he looked across at Etoile herself.

His eyes were thoughtful, dreamy, when he chose, absolutely unrevealing; they had the dropped languid amorous lids and the long dark lashes of his country. Wherever his eyes lighted, Lady Joan's followed and lighted too.

As he looked he was thinking, as long afterwards he told Etoile—

"That woman is half a saint and half a muse.

"She has never loved.

"She is full of idealities.

"She has strong passions, but they sleep.

"Her dreams are the enemies of men.

"She does not care for the world.

"She has been used to her own way, and she has treated all men with indifference; some few with friendship; none with tenderness.

"She seems cold; but I think she is only uninterested.

"She is all mind. Her senses have never stirred. She does not belong to our world.

"She has thoughts that go far away from us.

"She has not enough frivolity to enjoy her own generation.

"She has lovely eyes: they say so much without knowing that they say anything.

"She has beautiful hands.

"She is dressed perfectly.

"I shall detest her.

"Or I shall adore her.

"Which of the two? I do not know.

"Perhaps both."

So he thought of Etoile, watching her across the table whilst he talked with polite attention to his hostess, who snapped him short with her curt, sharp, bright humour, and seldom allowed him to finish a sentence.

He looked very much like a grave, slender deerhound held down under a keeper's leash.

There was pride in his eyes and high spirit on his aquiline features, but at the table of the Challoners he was subdued and silent; or at other moments over-assiduous to please. Etoile noticed this; and wondered what relation he bore to them. She gathered from what was said by him and to him that he was a noble of Rome; a courtier; and the owner of an estate to which they constantly referred as Fiordelisa, but which seemed by some inexplicable arrangement to be the Lady Joan's property also.

"What beautiful grapes!" the Chief Justice chanced to say, "finest where all are fine. They are your own growth?"

The Lady Joan nodded assent.

"Yes; they're all off my vines—down at Fiordelisa."

"You like grapes, Madame?" said Ioris to Etoile, who was opposite to him. "Oh! you must allow me to send you some—from Fiordelisa."

"What is Fiordelisa?" thought Etoile. She did not know that, although Fiordelisa was the property of Ioris, Ioris was still more absolutely the property of the Lady Joan.

"What a pretty name, Fiordelisa!" she hazarded as she thanked him.

Lady Joan interrupted his reply.

"Yes; it was a beastly old barrack when we went in it: but we have done no end to improve it, inside and out," said the hostess, cracking a walnut.

Etoile fancied that the face of the Roman Prince grew a shade paler still, as with anger, but she thought it might be only her fancy; all artists are fanciful. He drew a flower out of one of the bowls near him, and busied himself fastening it into his buttonhole.

Dinner over, they sauntered into one of the three or four little salons of the house; a little room with Smyrna carpets and comfortable couches, and a great many pictures, and a great deal of china. Here the Lady Joan opened her cigar-case, threw herself back at ease, and expressed her hope that everybody smoked.

Everybody did, except Etoile.

"Ah! Comtesse, you are right and wise not to do so," said the Prince Ioris, as he crossed over to her. "Smoking has no grace upon a woman's lips, and little sense on ours."

The Lady Joan hastily crossed over also, her cigar in her hand.

"What things you do say, Io," she muttered, crossly. "You know Lady Cardiff smokes like a steam-engine. How stupid you were at dinner, too! Go and amuse

the Chief Justice; you see Mr. Challoner's boring him to death."

He went obedient, but not resigned, to address the Chief Justice, with all the warm and charming courtesy of his habitual manner, which *en vrai Italien*, was never warmer or more charming than when he was somewhat annoyed and very much wearied. The Lady Joan presented Lady Cardiff to the Countess d'Avesnes, and, content with the diversion she had effected, repaid herself with joining her male guests, and receiving a person who just then entered, and whom she saluted delightedly as her "very dear old Mimo!"

The very dear old Mimo—otherwise Count Burletta—was a very shrewd person, of some fifty years old, fat and fair, smiling and serene. Fate had given him a meagre purse and a keen eye; he rambled about Rome, in and out all sorts of odd places, and about three o'clock might be found at home any day, surrounded with the fruits of his rambles, ivories, enamels, tarsia work, china, cloisonné, lac, anything and everything that garrets and palaces, cellars and convents, could be persuaded to render; in society he was a gentleman, and could lie like one; in his shop he was honest—unless he met with a fool—fools, he thought, were sent by the saints as food was sent by Elijah's ravens—he was a very good Catholic.

The very dear old Mimo, dropping now down on the divan beside her, murmured to her many things in a low tone, unheard by ears profane, and then drew out her guitar from under a pile of music.

"Io!" called the Lady Joan; "where's that last song of the Trastevere you wrote down for me?—the one we heard the girl sing as we came home from the Valle the other night?"

Ioris left the Chief Justice and searched for the song.

Being found, the Lady Joan would not sing it—she sang something else; the riband of her old Spanish guitar hanging over her shoulder; her sweeping velvet and her shining stars making a fine study for a painter; her handsome teeth gleaming and her eyes flashing up to her listeners with an amorous glittering gaze that burned its way straight up to the face of Ioris, (who leaned towards her and beat the time softly with his hand, and gave back the answering glance that it was his due and his duty to give. But—

“That man is only feigning; why does he have to feign?” thought the Countess d’Avesnes, and looked to see if Mr. Challoner observed what she did.

Mr. Challoner was too well drilled by thirteen years of wedded life ever to observe anything; Mr. Challoner at the other end of the room discussed political news with the Chief Justice in an undertone, so as not to disturb his wife’s singing. He never disturbed his wife; he was the marital model of the nineteenth century. There are many like him; but not perhaps many quite so perfect.

His wife’s singing was agreeable, though she sang out of time and her accent was harsh; still, she had a rich voice naturally, and could give the songs of the populace, and the erotic lays of the streets and fields, with a force and a *brio* hardly to be surpassed by the Romans themselves.

It was not pure execution nor perfect phrasing, and it used to set the teeth of real musicians on edge, but there was something contagious and intoxicating in it as she struck deep vibrations from the chords and poured from her glances a passionate light. She never looked so well as when she sang; it sent warmth into her lips

and took the hardness from her face; singing, the passion that was in the woman broke up from the shrewd worldly sense, and the prosaic temper, that covered and hid it; singing, she looked like the swart sovereign of Musset's poem, who laughed to see the bold bull die and flung her broidered garter to her lover the matador.

"Allow me to compliment you on your gown, my dear Comtesse," said Lady Cardiff, meanwhile seated beside Etoile. "You must be tired of compliments on your talents. What charming things Worth does for people of taste! He *clothes* Mrs. Henry V. Clams over yonder, you know; what a difference! I am so glad you condescend to think about dress. It brings you nearer our poor humanity; genius so often, you know——"

"Is too much like St. Simeon Stylites; I quite agree with you. There is more affectation in sackcloth than in silk. Besides, to be clothed with taste is a pleasure to oneself. What do you call that remarkable person who thinks it necessary to load herself with rubies for a little dinner party?"

"Mrs. Henry V. Clams. Fontebranda has made her, forced her down all our throats; very cleverly he has done it. He's no money, you know, and they've heaps. As somebody said of somebody in the last century (Duc d'Orléans, wasn't it?), not being able to make her Marquise Fontebranda, which I am sure he'd be very sorry to do, he has made himself Mr. Henry V. Clams, and I think it pays him very much better."

"I see. Do you visit them?"

"Oh, of course. Everybody visits them. They entertain very well; it's all Fontebranda. Are you staying long in Rome?"

"All the winter, I think."

"Delighted! I hope it's not true what they say—that your lungs are affected?"

"A little, I fear; nothing serious."

"Ah, dear me. Aldebaran—you should inhale Aldebaran. Do get a bottle. Consumption cured for half-a-crown; you know the thing I mean."

"I have more faith in the Roman air. Who is that person tuning Lady Joan's guitar?"

"Her very dear old Mimo? Well, that is—Mimo,—Count Burletta, you know. A good creature. Tradesman from twelve to four; Count all the rest of the day and night. If you want to buy teacups and triptychs, ask Lady Joan to take you there; and, if you want to please, pay, and don't ask the age of the object. Mean? Oh, I mean nothing. Mimo is a connoisseur—everybody is a connoisseur here—and gives ignorant people the benefit of his knowledge. That is all. How do you like her singing?"

"Well, you see, I am too used to great music to be very easily pleased. The first musicians of Paris gather at my house, and then my friend Dorotea sings to me alone so constantly."

"Ah, the Duchesse Santorin. She is here, isn't she?"

"She is gone. She only came to see me one day. She was engaged at Petersburg. She has promised me to return in two months."

"Tell me, do tell me. You must know. Is it true that Santorin has sent her a citation to appear; that he is about to sue for a separation?"

"He has sent her a schedule of his latest debts. That is all that I know of——"

"But there is some scandal about that handsome Russian, Souroff, that Imperial aide-de-camp—you know whom I mean. What is his name? Fédor?"

"There is no cause for any; that I can assure you. Count Souroff is in the Caucasus."

"Dear me!" said Lady Cardiff vaguely, disappointed, but reflecting that of course the friend of the Duchesse Santorin must *say* that sort of thing.

"Lady Joan looks very handsome as she sings," said Etoile, to change the theme.

The English peeress put her glass up to her eye, and looked at the singer.

"A good-looking woman, yes, and highly-born, and young still, and no fool, and yet married to a Mr. Challoner!"

"There are very odd things in life, are there not?" continued the Marchioness musingly. "Nothing odder than its Mr. Challoners. You know her father? Indeed! A charming person: very unlike *her*, don't you think? Yes, I am going; sorry to leave you, but I must look in at the Ruspoli's. I shall slip out quietly while she is making that noise. So charmed you have come to Rome, my dear Comtesse. Pray, don't forget my Mondays."

"I suppose people do receive her?" said Lady Cardiff to her host, who rushed to intercept her passage, and escort her down the stairs.

"Whom? Etoile? Oh, certainly, there never was a breath against her."

"Oh, my dear Mr. Challoner, I don't mean that. What *does* that matter? We receive tens of thousands of people with nor'-westers blowing them black and blue"—(Mr. Challoner winced)—"every day of their lives. Heaps of good people are out of society, and heaps of bad people in; only we can't receive anybody unless other folks receive her too. Nobody can *begin*, you know. It gets thrown against you afterwards; if a woman is really received, it don't in the least matter what she's done or

what she does do. Nobody's any business with the rest of her life. *Is she received?* That is all. As for this particular woman, she is charming. And, of course, everybody *you* know has the passport to my house, and every other house. Coming to the Ruspoli's? No? Ah, true! You don't know them. Pity. Many thanks. Very cold. Thanks. Good evening."

And, having wrapped up many thorns in velvet in her parting speech, the Marchioness of Cardiff rolled away in her carriage to the Palazzo Ruspoli, leaving Mr. Challoner bowing on the step in the teeth of the sharp easterly wind, with all the thorns pricking in him as he turned and went upstairs. Happily for himself, he had a tough epidermis, and could remain impenetrable to thorns and even harpoons. Mr. Challoner knew that nothing answers in the long run like invulnerability.

His wife was still singing when he entered, and her very dear old Mimo was praising a little Masolino panel to the Chief Justice, who did not know much about art, but was very open-handed with his money, all the world knew.

The Prince Ioris, having gazed his heart out through three songs, and made his eyes utter more amorous lyrics than any she sang, thought he had done what duty required of him, and sank away quietly into a corner of the sofa by Etoile, and picked up some fallen leaves of the tea-roses, and talked with serious feeling and graceful taste of various themes of art, and gazed at her as he did so with that musing studious regard which is the subtlest form of early homage.

The Lady Joan saw, and sang out of time for two seconds. The Lady Joan threw her guitar aside with a haste and force that imperilled its safety, and came out of her little circle of admiring listeners, and bore down

on the sofa where Ioris was still tossing a few fragrant tea-rose leaves in his hand and talking of art.

"Go with her to-morrow to the Loggè?" she called out sharply. "What are you thinking of, Io? You've got to take me to the studios; and then there is that bust to see to at Fricco's, and the Bishop of Melita coming to luncheon, and there are heaps of things in the afternoon. You can't go anywhere to-morrow. Besides, she's got old Padre Marcello—a man who carries more art-knowledge about Rome in his little finger than you do in all your brain, which is not the very biggest to hold anything."

She laughed as she spoke, and blew some smoke round her classic hand.

Ioris bowed resignedly.

"I am at your commands, madame, of course, as always."

"Oh, are you!" said his hostess, roughly, too out of temper to be able to control the irritability she felt. "Then another time don't keep me twenty minutes waiting, as you did this morning at Fricco's: what were you after?"

"I was at the Vatican."

"Well, you must be here to-morrow at ten. Mind that; and see Pippo has the new curb on; he jibbed dreadfully yesterday. Are you going? So early. I am so sorry; it is only eleven o'clock," she continued, with her frankest pleasantest smile, as Etoile rose from the sofa, unconscious that her rose-leaves had been falling on a volcano's brink.

"We must be friends for my father's sake," said Lady Joan; "how glad I am you came to Rome!" and she followed her through the rooms and the ante-room, with cordial phrases and a dozen pleasant kindly plans for future intimacy and mutual amusement.

Ioris, evading direction, reached down the furs, and enveloped with them the maize and black bows of Worth, and gave Etoile his arm.

"How handsome she is, and very agreeable," said Etoile, as they went downstairs.

Ioris was silent.

"You are a friend of Lord Archie's?" he said, after a moment's pause—a pause, it seemed to her, of some slight embarrassment.

"Yes; I know him well—dear gentle Lord Archie."

"I also am fond of Lord Archie."

"Are you any relation to them?"

"None at all," replied Ioris, with a certain impatience.

"I may have the honour to call on you, madame. Perhaps I may be of some little use. No doubt you will know everyone in Rome, but anything that I could do——"

Mr. Challoner overtook them on the staircase, with Mrs. Henry V. Clams and Fontebranda, who were leaving also.

"My wife wants you, Ioris," said the gentleman; "there is some other song that can't be found."

"You have forgotten this, madame," said Ioris, in the street, as he escaped from Mr. Challoner, putting the big black Spanish fan through the window of the carriage. "And do not heed what the Lady Joan said. I will have the honour of waiting on you to-morrow at noon for the Loggè, and although certainly I cannot compete in knowledge with the Padre Marcello, still, if zeal and devotion can serve you at all in this my native city——"

The horses, impatient, reared and plunged forward on the uneven pavement of the street, and left his phrase unfinished upon Etoile's ear.

He looked a moment into the moonlight, then re-ascended the stairs.

"Io!" cried the Lady Joan; "come and make me some fresh cigarettes. Now we can enjoy ourselves. Mimo's got such a capital story; awfully *salato*, but so good."

CHAPTER VII.

THE Lady Joan Challoner came of a very good old stock.

The Perth-Douglas family was one about whose ancientness and admirableness there could never be any dispute. The Perth-Douglasses had always been gentlefolks, and their names could be read backwards by the light of history as far as the days of Flodden and of Bannockburn. Though of such knightly descent, they were very poor, and of no great estate; but they were own cousins to the mighty Earl of Hebrides, had intermarried with the no less mighty Marquises of Lothian, were cousins-german to the Dukes of Lochwithian and the Lords of Fingal, and owned Scotch cousinships to more peers than the Order of the Thistle embraces, and as many baronets as the Nova Scotia riband adorns.

Her father, Archibald Angus Perth-Douglas, fifth Earl of Archiestoune—always called by his friends Archie—had no seat in the Lords, and was glad of a Government place, and a small office at Court. He was an infinitely charming person, whom everybody loved and caressed. Her mother had been a beauty and a wit; her grandmother the same. The Lady Joan, at nineteen, had been married to Mr. Robert Challoner, an obscure gentleman, whose parentage was doubtful, and whose prosperity was

dubious. People had wondered very much why such a handsome well-born girl as Joan Perth-Douglas should be married to a Mr. Challoner.

If she had been a trifle cleverer than the clever woman she was, of course she would have told people she had adored him, and had insisted on having him and none other. But as she always told everybody roundly that she had always hated him, this explanation could not be put forward by even her blindest admirers.

There were one or two people who did know why—really why—but a popular and eminent politician had been trustee to the marriage settlements, and no one could be indiscreet enough to persist in inquiring why the settlements ever had been drawn up at all.

The Lady Joan all her life long was rich in discreet friends.

Still even the discreetest friends will, like the closest-packed hold of a ship, leak occasionally. Salt water and secrets are alike apt to ooze. So, whatever the reason might be, the Challoners lived out of England.

The Perth-Douglasses were clever people, and had had the knack of always frequenting the society of cleverer people than themselves. Without ever having distinguished themselves intellectually, they yet had thus gained an intellectual reputation; and on the feet of their ladies there had been often stockings of blue.

For gentle, gracious, handsome Earl Archie, his women were too many and too strong, and they worried him sorely; he consoled himself with society which was always delighted to console him. His wife—beautiful and masterful—and his mother and sisters, not so beautiful, but masterful too, disputed and quarrelled and vexed him. He was a man who thought peace the one supreme good of life, but he was seldom destined to enjoy it.

His lot was cast throughout existence amidst *maîtresses-femmes*: they are admirable and wonderful beings, no doubt, but no man ever found them conducive to his comfort as companions.

Of his daughter Lord Archie had never felt that he knew very much. He had thought the marriage a very odd one and a very disadvantageous one, and had done his best in his gentle, sweet-tempered, tranquil fashion to oppose it. But when he was told by his wife and his old friend the eminent politician that it had to be, and was the best thing that could be, he acquiesced, because acquiescence had become his habit with his numerous feminine rulers.

He was not behind the scenes; and they told him a great many fictions of the Challoner fortune and the Challoner devotion: after all it was as the girl liked, it was her affair more than anyone's.

Gentle Lord Archie thought everything was for the best in this best of all possible worlds. He never worried himself or anybody else. He gave away his daughter at the altar, to what he stigmatised in his own soul as a cad, with the same benign placidity with which, a dozen years afterwards, he lay in the sunshine and smoked his cigars under the walnut trees at Fiordelisa: everything was all right—that was Lord Archie's formula. It is the only one possible for a man governed by three generations of women with wills of their own.

Thirteen years had gone by since Lord Archie had led his daughter up to the marriage altar, wondering why Joan, who had been a good deal admired at her first drawing-room, and had spirit enough for fifty cavalry soldiers, had not waited a little while and done better for herself.

Thirteen years found the Lady Joan still a young woman.

She had swept a good deal of adventure into the dozen and one seasons that Mr. Challoner's name had been her sunshade in the heats of slander, and her waterproof in the storms of censure.

Mr. Challoner's business, in which he had risen from a clerk to a managing partner, lying in Damascus and Aleppo, she had had the far East and the vague sand-plains of distant countries for her theatre; and, in spite of steam and of electricity—those fatal levellers of illusion—the “far Orient” still remains to the European mind a shadowy and gorgeous panorama of mystery.

Perhaps through that golden haze of distance the European mind saw the adventures of the Lady Joan, as in a mirage, multiplied; at any rate, home-coming travellers told many tales, and averred that “Archie's daughter” was “going it over there.” She had Asiatic ministers for her henchmen, and Turkish pashas for her obedient slaves; big bankers were as babies in her hands, and imperial steamers were at her beck and call; when a good-looking wayfarer chanced to have time for such pastimes, she would have her Arab steeds saddled and scamper away with him over the Syrian Desert; and a young titled Giaour on his pilgrimage found no resting-place more agreeable than her flat house-top in Damascus, with champagne in the ice-pails, and Mr. Challoner in his counting-house.

If anybody thought it odd that she should camp out on the sand plains with strangers, such people were old fogies in the Lady Joan's eyes; these men were all her brothers—a kind providence sent them to prevent her yawning her head off with the intolerable boredom of Mr. Challoner's company—and she would jump on her mare, and cut her across the ears, and scamper off with silver-mounted pistols in her sash, and a cigar in her

mouth, knowing very well that Mrs. Grundy cannot do you much harm when you ride under the shadow of Mount Lebanon. And even had Mrs. Grundy loomed there in the stead of Mount Lebanon, she could have said nothing, because Mr. Challoner himself never said anything.

He busied himself with his exports of jewellery and prayer-carpets, of spice and specie, of rubies and rice, and his business generally, and his fellow merchants, and his own reflections; and moved about Damascus, and other cities of the East, a very big man amongst the Jews and Gentiles, the Turks and the Persians, because of the Perth-Douglas connection away in the North, and the privilege it bestowed on him to ask any travelling Englishman of rank to dinner and speak of "my wife's cousins," the Countess of Hebrides, or the Duchess of Lochwithian.

When, some six years later, having ruined a very fine business by too fine speculations, he found it expedient to leave the bazaars and retreat on his wife's settlements, she brought with her from the red Eastern skies a duskier hue on her handsome face, a great skill at rolling cigarettes, much good Turkish tobacco, and some good Oriental jewellery, some trash and some treasure out of the bazaars, a great many souvenirs—some tender, some fierce—and a decided experience that she might play "poker" with all the Ten Commandments, so long as she wrapped herself in the proof armour of Mr. Challoner's approval and acquiescence.

She had learnt by heart the Arab proverb, that "she who has her husband with her may turn the moon around her finger."

So useful was her husband, indeed, that at weak moments she was almost grateful to him, and absolutely called him Robert, a condescension very rare with her,

as she never let him or anybody forget that she had a right to write herself "born Perth-Douglas."

But the Black Sea once crossed again, the Lady Joan saw Mrs. Grundy, the British Bona Dea, looming large on her horizon, as the Colossus once did upon the sea from Rhodes.

The Lady Joan was shrewd enough to know that the British Bona Dea will not believe that all men are your brothers. The Lady Joan pulled her mainsail in, and tacked her course so as to pass safely under the Colossus.

It had not been worth while out there, but here it was so. And, after all, it was better to keep decently well with that little house in Mayfair, and all the family ties and honours. The little house had borne a great deal indeed, as little houses when they are the abode of a Great House, often do; great houses never washing their dirty linen in the street. But Lady Joan knew that there were some things that would be too strong even for the little house in Mayfair, and that it would never do not to dine there when she went over "on business" to London, though she had to scream till she was hoarse into her grandmother's ear-trumpet, and derived no pleasure from hearing the Head of the Opposition read his "Notes on the Œcumenical Council" or his conception of an obscure passage of Tertullian.

So, for sake of the little house in Mayfair, and of a great many big houses all over Europe that she desired to enter, the Lady Joan, leaving the Bagdad bazaars and the Great Desert, left her imprudence behind her, and consigned everything of a dangerous sort to oblivion, except the Khedive's inspiration of her letters to the *Planet* newspaper, and the pearls with which the Emir of Yarkund had presented her for saving his life from poison.

For, touching a European strand, the hand of Mrs. Grundy clasped her, and the shadow of Mrs. Grundy fell on her as in eclipse falls the shade of the "stolid earth upon the giddy moon."

In the East, Lady Joan had been very young, very reckless, with her spirits far outbalancing her prudence, and her savageness at her exile and social extinction avenging itself by all those wild night-rides with the good-looking travellers, and all those campings out under the desert stars, with nobody to play propriety except the Arab boys and the tethered ponies.

The Lady Joan in her childhood, even in the year or two between her presentation at Court and her social extinction under the Challoner settlements, had seen the really great world. All that was best in society had habitually gathered round her beautiful mother. She knew what mighty people and witty people, and people of fashion and people of genius were. For the Anglo-Persian world of shabby adventurers, of hungry commercial folks, of intriguing speculators, of oily Jews, of lean Gentiles, and of trade-fattened nobodies her contempt had been naturally boundless. She had done as she liked, and scoffed at the whole lot, and only smiled on them when she wanted a steamer or any such little trifle of them. She was a Perth-Douglas; and if she chose to dance the Carmagnole in all their counting-houses the mercantile mud of Asia Minor could only be honoured: so she danced it.

But when the chill colossal shadow of Mrs. Grundy fell across her path Lady Joan saw that she must mend her ways. It was not steamers that she would want now, but suffrages.

Of course she despised Mrs. Grundy as much as she had despised the mercantile mud; Mrs. Grundy was an

old cat, and represented old cats collectively. Still it was necessary to conciliate her, and even in the country of the *cicisbei* it would be best to be on good terms with Society.

Of course Society should never really interfere with her liberty; of course Society should never prevent her regarding all men as her brothers; of course Society should never alter her dancing the Carmagnole over the *convenances*, as she had done over the counting-houses whenever she liked; nevertheless, she said to herself she would reconcile herself with Society.

There were many things to be got by it, and Society after all asks very little. Society only asks you to wash the outside of your cup and platter: inside you may keep any kind of nastiness that you like; only wash the outside; do wash the outside, says Society; and it would be a churl or an ass indeed who would refuse so small a request.

Lady Joan set to work and washed her cup and platter with such a clatter and so many soap-suds, and summoned so many good people to look on at her doing it, that no one could possibly ask her what she drank and ate out of it, nor who sipped from it with her.

Mr. Challoner himself set both cup and platter upon a shelf in the sight of Society. Society could want no more.

As lawless free-lances in days of old entered monkish cells and buried Dick the Devil or Dent du Sanglier for ever under Brother Philarete or Father Joseph, so the Lady Joan, entering society, immured her Eastern escapades under the seal of an entire self-oblivion. Nothing was ever to be remembered by anybody that she wished to be forgotten. This was settled. It is a demand that women are very fond of making on the good-nature or

the good taste of mankind. And if occasionally she met an old friend uncivil enough or unkind enough, without knowing that he did wrong, to "hint past history" and disturb the present, she would, with all the heartiest air of candour and of wonder in the world,

Stare upon the strange man's face
As one she ne'er had known,

and continue so to stare in despite of all recollections that he might invoke.

It was still a marriage for which none could see any *raison d'être*. But when you go to the East and stay there in a kind of golden mist it is easy to leave explanations behind you when you return. All that trading of the Levant in various goods, from bales of hay to squares of prayer-carpet, to which Mr. Challoner owed his being, had come to an untimely ending, as was well enough known, from Bagdad to Brindisi, to all merchants and bankers. And Mr. Challoner had only saved a few thousands out of the crash, and was, in real truth, an unfortunate gentleman with a hankering turn for speculation.

But the Lady Joan was not troubled by such little facts as these; the magnificence of her imagination raised her far above all prosaic realities; what a few old fogies in bank parlours or on public exchanges, might say or know was nothing to her; according to her Mr. Challoner had been Croesus; the rice and the carpets were merged vaguely into what she called "our bank;" Solomon's Temple had not been more gorgeous than the fortunes to which her family had sacrificed her.

There had been failures; yes, certainly there had been failures; but then even Croesus could not escape Cyrus.

As for what those old fools of consuls and merchants

said, that was all rubbish; and she would close with an apotheosis of herself as a sort of Semiramis of Finance, in which the angels who upheld her in the empyrean were "dear old Pam," and "dear old Thiers," and "dear old Elgin," and anybody else of magnitude appropriate whom she had ever had a nod from in her babyhood in her grandmother's little house in Mayfair.

There was, indeed, scarce a great man in France, England, or Germany whom she did not claim as her "dearest old" A, B, or C; if a critic or a chancellor, a *savant* or a general, a geologist or a Prime Minister had ever walked thirty years before into her mother's drawing-room when she was playing on the hearthrug with her alphabet, the critic or chancellor, the *savant* or general, the geographer or Prime Minister was now forever in the mouth of the Lady Joan as her one dearest old friend, that was more devoted to her than any other living creature on the face of the earth.

Perhaps she had recalled herself once to their bewildered memories in some crowded reception; perhaps she had bowed to them twice in the Prater, the Bois, or the Mall; perhaps she never had seen them at all since the days of her alphabet; all this mattered nothing; the critic or chancellor, *savant*, general, geographer, or Prime Minister never were by when she dilated upon them with such glowing affection; and, even if they had been, would have been too polite to contradict her. Gentlemen do not contradict women nor yet show them up; a chivalrous weakness of mankind, of which the weaker sex always takes the very sternest advantage.

Occasionally those disagreeable and sceptical people who are to be found spoiling all society would hint that, with such distinguished friendships and such illimitable political and literary connections, it was a little wonder-

ful that the Lady Joan should have married a Mr. Chalonier and take an interest in teacups and triptychs. But such people were in the minority. For the most part, her use of her dearest old A, B, and C, at moments when A was organising a great war, or B busied in discrowning kings, or C sending forth on the world a great book mighty as Thor's hammer, was of infinite gain to her; and her allies would go hither and thither, important and confidential, and whisper, "She knew the declaration of war five days before anybody;" or "He wrote to her the very night he dictated his abdication;" or "She had an early copy even before it went to the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*;" and these fictions flew about lively as gnats and productive as bees, and secured many cards to her big Delft card-plate, because, though nobody believed all of it, everybody said some of it must be true—yes, a great deal of it must be true—because people never will admit or even think that they are the mere dupes of a brilliant audacity.

To the world in general A, B, and C were names of magnitude and weight, of awe or of adoration, as the case might be; but to her they were only "dear old creatures." Had they not stumbled over her alphabet thirty years before upon her mother's hearthrug?

It was an alliance for a lifetime.

According to the Lady Joan she was a Nausicaa, airily frolicking on the edge of the vast ocean of European complications; and Odysseus had gone through all his woes and warfare, and only lay in wait under the waves, just to be ready to catch her ball for her—only just for that.

Odysseus never even saw her, never even thought of her, as he waded in his deep dark seas; but all that did not matter to her.

Nor to her associates.

"Such a woman! ah, such a woman!" would murmur plump Mimo Burletta. "Palmerstonè relied on her for all his secret information of Oriental things; Palmerstonè told her when she was eighteen that if she were but a man she would die Prime Minister of the Crown; Palmerstonè was not one to call a lemon-pip a lemon—ah, no, no, no!—Palmerstonè knew!" And Burletta would walk about and spread out his fat hands in honest adoration of her mighty powers and of himself for being the confidant of so great a creature; and in his mind's eye, when it was not concentrated on teacups and triptychs, always beheld the Lady Joan seated as on a throne within the sacred recesses of the Privy Council chamber of the Universe, for he knew as much about such things as a French grocer in the provinces knows of the *Lord Maire de Londres*, and the Lady Joan's magnificent confidences had dazzled him too much to much enlighten him.

Exaggeration aside, she had very great connections and relationships, and never forgot or let anybody else forget that she had them. When a cousin of high degree came near she proclaimed the fact as loudly and loyally as heralds in days of old shouted the titles and tidings of a new king, and these mighty personages did her unwittingly yeoman's service.

They were her cork buoys on the yeasty seas of European society. Big people liked her because she took such infinite trouble to please them, and little people liked her because she could bring them in contact with the big people.

Both big and little people always apologised to one another for knowing her; everyone excused their own especial countenance on some especial plea in their own especial society. But as she never knew this it did not

affect her comfort; indeed, Lady Joan was of that happy disposition which could ignore all enmity and accept all slights unmoved; and if she knew some one had been abusing her would meet the offender with such a smile, and such an emphatic cordiality, that she was the best Christian that ever, being buffeted on one cheek, turned graciously the other.

It was thoroughly sound policy.

Proud women, and sensitive women, take hints and resent rebuffs, and so exile themselves from the world prematurely and haughtily. They abdicate, the moment they see that any desire their discrowning. But Lady Joan was not troubled with this kind of delicacy. Abdication is grand, no doubt. But possession is more profitable. "A well-bred dog does not wait to be kicked out," says the old see-saw. But the well-bred dog thereby turns himself into the cold and leaves the crumbs from under the table to some other dog with less good-breeding and more worldly wisdom. The sensible thing to do is to stay wherever you like best to be; stay there with tooth and claw ready and a stout hide on which cudgels break. People, after all, soon get tired of kicking a dog that never will go.

High-breeding was admirable in days when the world itself was high-bred. But those days are over. The world takes high-breeding now as only a form of insolence.

Lady Joan saw this, and never troubled the world with it.

"The old cat slangs me like a pickpocket," she would say of some dowager-countess who did not return her card. But when she met the dowager-countess she would say, "Ah, dearest Lady Blank! Where *are* you staying? I am *so* sorry I have seen *so* little of you. You'll come

and dine with us? What night, now? Do fix a night—pray do.”

And nine times out of ten the Lady Blanks would relent and leave a card, and even go and eat a dinner at the Casa Challoner. For the Casa Challoner dinners were good, and the Casa Challoner understood the axiom that it is not what comes out of your own mouth but what you put into other people's that makes your friends or enemies. Besides, “you can't cut a woman who won't know when she's cut,” said a Lady Blank once;—Lady Joan had this most useful ignorance.

So on the whole she managed to enjoy life in Europe as in the East. There were always times when she could “throw her cap over the mill” and dance the Carmagnole, if there were also many seasons that she had to put on her meeting-house clothes and curtsey to Mrs. Grundy.

And besides, be the season what it would, there was always—Fiordelisa.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON the morrow the Prince Ioris, faithful to his word, went as noon chimed from all the bells of Rome to the Hôtel de Russie and inquired for the Comtesse d'Avesnes. But he learned that she had already gone out, alone; had been out since sunrise. He left his card and turned his steps along the Corso to the Casa Challoner. He was a good deal disappointed and a little irritated—more irritated than was reasonable.

“How late you are, Io! I told you ten o'clock,” said the Lady Joan, in high wrath.

She was ready-dressed for the streets, with her hat set well over her black brows, and her person muffled in

sealskin. Her friend noticed for the first time that her skirts were too short, and her boots were ill-made, and her eyes were green in the sunlight.

He pressed both her hands in his own and dropped on one knee before her sofa.

"You must forgive me. My head ached, and I had many letters to see to and answer."

"I thought you were gone to Etoile. You talked of it," said the Lady Joan, with an angry suspicion flushing in her eyes.

"Etoile! Cara mia, what living woman could keep me away one second from here?"

Kneeling still on the tigerskin before her, his lips caressed her with more softness than the words.

"Don't be a goose, Io; we're past all that—at least so early in the morning," said the Lady Joan. But she smiled as she pushed him away, and was well pleased that he should be what she called a goose. Had he not been thus a goose, darkest wrath would have gathered on her stormy brows.

"Let's get off, though," she said, disengaging herself, but sweeping his hair off his forehead with a rough caress as she rose. "We're so late as it is, and I'm awfully afraid that the dealer from Paris will have got those little pictures of Cecchino's—the boy's beginning to know his value and ask a price."

Ioris loaded himself with her wraps, her umbrella, and her little dog, and followed her down the stairs to the *fiacre*.

When she did not take his ponies out she drove in a hack carriage. Not to keep a carriage was an economy on which she prided herself.

"A carriage is only ostentation—snobs want one: I don't," she would say in her blunt, pleasant manner. "I

always tell Mr. Challoner I like my own legs; and when they're tired there's always a cab; cabs are so cheap."

And so, indeed, they were, since Ioris always paid for them.

The hired carriage started off, Mr. Challoner regarding its departure placidly from a window, for his friendship and his faith were both strong, and the wheels rattled noisily up and down the hilly streets of Rome.

"What did you think of Etoile?" she asked Ioris as they drove. Etoile was very much in her own thoughts.

"She does not please me particularly," he answered carelessly as he lighted a cigar.

"Do you think her attractive?"

"No, not at all."

"We must see a good deal of her. Voightel recommends her to me so strongly."

Her friend shrugged his shoulders.

"Why do you do that? Will she bore you?"

"I think her manner insolent. She seems to see no one. She is *nonchalante*: she is indifferent. I should think her cold."

"She must warm for you, Io!" said Lady Joan, with a gleam of anxiety and irony in her eyes.

"Oh! *Dieu m'en garde!*"

It was said with so genuine an emphasis, and so careless and gay a laugh, that Lady Joan was quite satisfied as she ascended and descended scores of dark, foul-smelling stairways, her friend behind her, into the garrets of the young painters. The Challoners were well-known patrons of young painters, and especially given to such patronage when those studious lads had a talent for making new canvases look like old.

The Lady Joan adored art: she told everybody so. She passed half her present life striding in and out of

ateliers, and petting painters, and buying canvases; the cheaper she bought them the better was she pleased. Of course the Challoner purse could not afford a large purchase except now and then on speculation.

The old masters, fortunately for the Challoner purse, were so bounteously thoughtful of those who would come after them (and sell them) that they all had their schools. Now, "Scuola di Perugino," "Scuola di Tiziano," sounds almost as imposing as Perugino and Tiziano alone; and, what is still more advantageous, these schools have been prolonged into the present day, and have many disciples hard at work still in the various styles, on impasto and *chiaroscuro* with varnish and smoke, in many attics and cellars of Florence, Naples, and Rome. To these young disciples the Lady Joan was a goddess; and if they grumbled now and then at her prices, that was but youth's idle ingratitude, Minerva was not worse than a dealer; whilst away in Great Britain acres on acres of new plaster walls bloomed with fair Madonnas and glowed with fierce martyrdoms; and Shoddy, that had built the walls, was satisfied and triumphant. So much joy can one clever woman diffuse.

The young painters did, indeed, say savage things of these kind patrons of theirs in moments of confidence, when together over maccaroni and wines in an *osteria* outside the gates. But this was only the ingratitude of the artistic nature, which, it is well known, always does turn against its best benefactors. And when one was born a Perth-Douglas, and has been obliged to marry a Mr. Challoner, and has never had as much money as one wanted for anything, it would be hard indeed if one might not enjoy such innocent compensations as may lie for one in commerce—nay, art.

Most people (except artists) carried off the impression

that Lady Joan knew a good deal about art. She had a bright, fine, imposing way of declaring her opinions infallible that went far towards making others believe them so. She knew that in this Age of Advertisement modesty is your ruin; what one has does not matter much, it is by what one seems to have that one rises or falls nowadays.

Connoisseurs and scholars found Lady Joan appallingly ignorant, and looked at each other helplessly when she swore a Byzantine crucifix was a Cellini, or a bit of Berlin *pâte dure* was Capo di Monte; when she assigned rococo jewellery to Agnès Sorel, and a panel of the Bologna Decadence to Andrea Mantegna.

But then those connoisseurs and scholars are not all the world, and Lady Joan addressed herself to that much larger body—the great majority of the uneducated. Indeed, perhaps nobody can comprehend how utterly uneducated it is possible to be who has not lived entirely with the educated classes.

Before the mass of idle people, moneyed people, ladies of fashion, and princes of shoddy she found an audience credulous of her assertions and uncritical of her pretensions, and very easily dazzled and bewildered with a little talk about schools and tones; about early painters whom they did not like to avow they had never heard of; about Frankenthal, which they vaguely mixed up with Frankenstein; about Marc Antonios, which they confused with Marc Antony; about Nankin, which they thought was a stuff, and found was a china; of Rose Dubarry, which they fancied somehow was something immoral; of Certosina, which they had an idea must mean something monastic; and of Bramante, which rhymed with Rozinante, and must be Spanish, they felt sure.

To rely on the general ignorance of mankind is usually safe, and Lady Joan did so rely not in vain. She was often found out in her blunders, indeed, and often laughed at; but then, as she was a gentlewoman, and not a tradesman, nobody ever told her, and people only laughed behind her back. That she could by any possibility ever be laughed at, never entered her own imagination.

This morning she raced up and down innumerable stairs, and in and out innumerable workshops of painters and sculptors and wood carvers, her hat well pulled down over her broad black brows, and her friend labouring under her wraps behind her. She cheapened everything she saw; made a million mistakes, which her friend softly corrected *sotto voce*; sat down astride before the easels, smoked the artists' cigars; diffused generally a sense of her own enormous influence with the English press and the English purchasers; bought a good deal of canvas and terracotta at dealers' prices; wearied her companion and bullied him, slapped students on the shoulders and rallied them with boisterous good fellowship; enjoyed herself exceedingly, and then, as the clock struck one in a neighbouring church-tower, "pulled herself together" and recollected her social duties.

"Come to luncheon, Io," she said, after the last studio, flinging away her last cigar-end. "Yes, you'd better come. It's the Bishop of Melita and roast mutton. Oh, yes, a horrid bore; but you'd better come. If the Bishop lunch with *you* it'll shut 'em up for a twelvemonth."

Who were to be "shut up" she did not explain, but her companion understood that the indefinite expression alluded to Mrs. Grundy and her myriad mouths.

"*Qui est Madame Gründée, ma chère?*" the Prince Ioris had asked in surprise on first hearing of this mighty

dame; but he never asked now; he had learned that Madame Gründée was the Bona Dea of the Lady Joan.

“My dear Io! you don’t know Mrs. Grundy!” Lady Joan would retort, when he wondered to see the cigars banished, the laugh hushed, the propriety donned, the domestic scene set, and Mr. Challoner taken about in the stead of himself, when the mighty Northerners came down with all pomp into Rome. She herself did know Mrs. Grundy; had felt that lady’s buffets, and knew the power of that lady’s smile. She was aware that Mrs. Grundy represented money, dinners, court balls, embassy receptions, and all the rest of the advantages of society, and in her heart of hearts, though she would boast otherwise, was afraid of Mrs. Grundy—sorely afraid sometimes.

There is no such coward as the woman who toadies society because she has outraged society. The bully is never brave.

“Oignez vilain il vous poindra: poignez vilain il vous oindra,” is as true of the braggart’s soul still, as it used to be in the old days of Froissart, when the proverb was coined.

Lady Joan was a bully by nature, and gave way to her nature without scruple or pity; but she knew that society was a bigger bully than herself, and did homage to it in the dust accordingly.

On this occasion Prince Ioris shuddered at the idea of roast sheep as even one of his own peasants would have done; and an English bishop was to him a nondescript animal of appalling and inexplicable anatomy; but he was well used to surrendering his own will, and accompanied his hostess submissively to her house, where he brushed the dust off himself and washed his hands in Mr. Challoner’s own sanctum in that amicable community

of goods which characterised his and that gentleman's friendship.

The Lady Joan carefully deodorised herself of all traces of cigar-smoke, brushed back her hair, and, sitting down for ten minutes by her dressing-room fire, glanced hurriedly through an article in the *Contemporary Review* on the dispute between Valentinian and Damasus in the days of the Early Church; and telling Ioris to come in five minutes after her, as if he came through the hall-door, went herself ready primed in all the proprieties to receive the Anglican Bishop of Melita and his wife to the roast loin of thoroughly domestic mutton.

The Anglican Bishop of Melita was a spare, solemn, scholarly person, who had been head of a House in Cambridge in his time. His wife was a no less solemn but much stouter personage, who had been the daughter of a dean, and was the niece, sister, and sister-in-law of quite countless canons, rectors, and pastors of all kinds. They had been presented to the Challoners two days before; and Mr. Challoner, who could bring up heavy artillery when required not unsuccessfully, had immediately engaged them for luncheon at once and a dinner at eight days' notice.

Mr. Challoner's own recollections of the island of Melita were not agreeable ones; but for that very reason he desired that all the world should behold how intimate he was with the Bishop of that valuable English possession. It was, indeed, by attention to such trifles as these that Mr. Challoner had succeeded in burying from the eyes of his wife's world all the uncomfortable little secrets that Melita had known of him and his. In this matter he and the Lady Joan were almost of accord. Whatever else they disagreed about (and they did disagree about nearly everything), they always agreed that it was absolutely

necessary to muzzle Madame Gründée. Madame Gründée is the one deity that English Society recognises—indeed, the only one that makes it go to church at all.

Lady Joan, a bold woman, grinned and grimaced at the goddess in the privacy of her life; but, being a wise woman, she did decorous worship to the goddess in the sight of others. She snapped her fingers at her Bona Dea behind her back; but she took care to bow with the rest in front of the altars.

This is the true wisdom of a woman. A poet's brain leaks through dreams, and is too big to hold such knowledge; but brains like the Lady Joan's are long and close and narrow, and shrewdly contain it.

Lady Joan thought that only a fool never hedged.

She liked her pleasures certainly, but she liked still better a good balance of many figures at Torlonia's. Illness might come, disfigurement might come, accident might come; age certainly would come. In those events lovers grow scarce, but the cosy swansdowns and sables of society and a safe income will console for their absence. We weaker mortals may find an infinite sadness in the picture of Sophie Arnould, once the Goddess of Love of all Paris, sweeping in her trembling old age the snow away from her miserable door; Sophie Arnould, once the lovely, the incomparable, the twin sister of the Graces, muttering, with the wind whistling round her withered limbs, of the dead days when all the Beau Siècle raved of the beauty of those feet and ankles; but the Lady Joan would only have laughed and said, "Old ass; she should have laid by her golden eggs while she got 'em." Lady Joan felt that she herself would never derive any consolation for being the subject of other people's tears; she meant to live and die comfortably, and never sweep the streets for other people: so she hedged.

Luckily for herself Lady Joan had as many manners as there are changes in a child's box of metamorphoses. Now and then, indeed, she overdid her part. Now and then she danced the Carmagnole, as one may say, by mistake, in her meeting-house clothes, or grinned when she should have pulled a long face. But on the whole she trimmed her candle cleverly, whether it had to be burned before the altar of the British Bona Dea, or whether it might flare as it liked amongst the dancing tapers of joyous Giovedì Grasso.

On such occasions as this luncheon the Casa Challoner was a temple of family felicity; it had Bass's beer and household harmony; it had the *Times* on the table, and said "my love" every five minutes; it had plain English cooking and simple English affections; it talked politics from English points of view and sighed that its general health compelled it to be out of dear old England so much.

Indeed, if only Mr. Challoner could have managed to look a little less wooden, and Lady Joan would not now and then have put her tongue in her cheek and grinned with an "aside" to her friend, the whole thing would have been perfect; even as it was it was masterly, especially when Mr. Challoner explained, under his breath: "a great friend of ours—poor fellow, his affairs were very involved—estate going to rack and ruin. I think we have helped him—yes, I may say we have helped him;" and when the Lady Joan, at the top of her table, sighed as she spoke of her beloved and lamented mother, talked a great deal—"so openly; oh, so openly!" as her guests said afterwards, "there could be nothing in it!"—of Fiordelisa and of its owner, who was like a brother to her and her husband, and made effective tableaux of maternal devotion with her little daughter, Effie, who was twelve years old and very

timid and shy, but who contributed not a little to the effect of the entertainment, especially when, with Lady Joan's arm round her, the little girl called the Prince Ioris—"Io."

"An excellent creature, let them say what they like," thought the Bishop's wife, whose *côté faible* was motherly excellence.

"A very charming woman," thought the Bishop, while the Lady Joan listened, with her eyes brightly shining in most eager interest, to his account of his new system for the religious supervision of ships' crews, and displayed her thorough comprehension of his recent article in the *Contemporary Review*.

Luncheon over, she carried off the Bishop and his wife and Mr. Challoner in a landau from a livery stable, and drove them about on to the Pincio, and up and down the Corso, in the sight of the city, which was in itself sufficient to silence slanderous tongues for a twelvemonth; and, bowing to her friends in the streets, with the shovel-hat in the front seat before her, felt she could go to as many masked balls as ever she liked with impunity.

Then she went to tea with the Bishop and his wife at their rooms in the Piazza di Spagna, and met many English dignitaries and dowagers, and many demure spinsters, to whom she talked of all her great Scotch cousins, and told them the dear Hebrides had taken Villa Adriana, outside Porta Pia, and offered her assistance in a lottery for the building of another Protestant church within the gates, for which they were petitioning the Government. After that, having bored herself to death with estimable energy and endurance (for the root of her success lay in never showing that she was wearied), she justly thought she had earned her rest and recreation, and told her husband to go home without her, which he did obediently, and she lay back in her landau on the cushions so lately

ecclesiastically sanctified, and laughed till she cried, and lighted a dozen cigarettes, and called for Ioris at his own house, and had a gay little dinner with him and three or four pets of hers, who accompanied her afterwards to the Capranica Theatre, and saw one of the wittiest and least decorous of the popular comedies, and amused herself vastly, and went homeward singing snatches of airs in chorus, and so upstairs into the Turkish room, where she sang more songs, with the guitar on her knee, and drank black coffee, and smoked, till the room was one dun-coloured cloud such as was wont to hide from mortal eyes the tender hours of Jupiter.

Thus did she make her grave bow in the face of her Bona Dea and dance her mirthful capers behind her, in one and the same day, and make the best of both worlds and smoke her cigar at both ends.

CHAPTER IX.

It was four by the clock when Ioris found himself free to walk home across the intense blackness and the brilliant whiteness of Roman shadows and Roman moonlight.

He drew his sables about him with a low sigh of relief as the porter closed the door behind him; he looked up at the stars, lighted a cigar, and paced homeward thoughtfully.

He was so used to it all that he had ceased to think about it, but this night it had bored him: the songs heard five hundred times, the furtive glances that told so old a story to him, the jests, the inquiries, the insistent passion—it was all so tiresome, and he was glad to get away from it and be by himself quiet in the mild moonlit winter's night.

To Ioris, Nature had been kind and Chance had been cruel.

He was tall and slender of form, with a delicate dark head, and a look of thoughtful and reticent calm which would have made the white monastic robes of a Dominican or the jewelled costume of a Louis Quinze courtier suit him better than the dress of the world that he wore. People looked at him far oftener than they did at still handsomer men.

It was one of those faces which suggest the romance of fate, and his eyes under their straight classic brows and their drooping lids could gaze at women with a dreaming amorous meaning that would pour trouble into the purest virgin soul.

Women never saw him for the first time without thinking of him when he had passed from sight. He had the charm of arousing at a first glance that vague speculative interest which once felt so easily grows little by little into love. Ioris was a man whom women always loved when he wished them to do so.

He was a Roman and a patrician: the purest blood and the most ancient lineage were his; they were all that remained to him of the vanished greatness of a race which had been second to none through a thousand centuries for valour, power, and all noble repute: he had fought, he had travelled, he had studied; he had the taste of an artist and the manner of a courtier; he looked like a picture, and he moved like a king. He had an old estate and an income slender in comparison with his rank, but sufficient for his habits, which, though elegant, still were simple. He loved his country and his dependents, and was happy in the life of an Italian noble, which is, perhaps, as lovely a life as there is to be led in this world. Alas! in an evil hour of his destiny the bold eyes

of a new-comer, roving over the crowds of a Court ball, had fallen on him, and his last hour of peace had then struck.

When the Lady Joan first arrived from the East life seemed to her grown very dull. It was before the season had begun; the air was heavy, the streets empty; she missed the red burning skies, she missed the fast desert scampers, she missed the noisy bazaars, she missed the camping out; she felt dull and depressed: the men around had not yet become her brothers; she was in that mood which, when an Englishman is in it, makes men of other nationalities say of him "that he wants something to kill." Lady Joan wanted something to kill, and she found it.

At various balls when the season came on she noticed a man who did not notice her. There was something in his slender grace and his delicate face, in his unrevealing eyes, in his cold glance, which fascinated her. What fascinated her much more was, that though when he bowed to other women his eyes were amorously soft and his laughter light and gay, his gaze if it chanced to light on her was chill and indifferent, and at all times he avoided her. In vain did she drift near him constantly, cast countless glances after him, waltz furiously past him, and flirt with his best friends; he took no notice of her, and seemed rather repelled than attracted. One evening she who was not easily baffled insisted that he should be presented to her. He tried to avoid his fate, but it was written; a friend, who cared more to please the imperious and handsome stranger from the banks of the Euphrates than to please him, entrapped him; escape was no longer possible without looking like a boor. He was brought, bitterly against his will, to her side: he was called Ireneo, Prince Ioris.

"She makes one think of a snake," he thought. Some fancies of the Nile had entangled themselves with this new acquaintance in his mind. She was everything that he disliked in woman; her voice seemed harsh to him, her gestures rough, her attitudes masculine, her look unfeminine. She had none of the soft charms of womanhood; she danced ill, she dressed ill; she was distasteful to him: she saw all that well enough, but she resolved to avenge it.

She bade him call on her: he could do no less. When he entered she seemed not to hear; her head was resting on her hands; she turned surprised and embarrassed; there were tears in her eyes; she spoke vaguely and hurriedly of *quelques amertumes*; she hinted a *vie incomprise*; she let fall a murmur of a *mariage mal assorti*.

It startled him.

To be astonished is in a sense to be interested.

This woman, who waltzed so madly, rode so recklessly, and looked like a young black-browed *bersagliere*, was not happy at heart—had a brutal husband—sighed restlessly for a happiness she had never known—concealed weariness and bitterness under the mask of a defiant courage and gaiety! The strange contrast of it arrested his attention, and she appeared to place confidence in him—a stranger who had for six months persistently avoided her—in a manner which perplexed as much as insensibly it flattered him. Men are always inclined to be pitiful to the woes of a woman when they are not woes which they themselves have caused. They will stone away without mercy a woman whom they themselves have wounded, but for the victim of another man they are quick to be moved to tenderness and indignation.

The Lady Joan, knowing this, having in vain tried all other sorceries, took her attitude as a victim. Whenever



she found anyone whom she thought would believe it she always became the victim of Mr. Challoner and of the rapacity of her family, which had sacrificed her to a Brute because he was a Cræsus. To be sure the riches were all left behind in the sands of Abana and Pharphar, and the brute was the most well-trained and patiently-enduring of *maris complaisants*; but at this time the Brute was absent in London, and her listener had never seen him, and of Cræsus he was not incredulous, because an Englishman is always supposed to be one, and on the Continent is given an unlimited credit on account of that supposition, of which he seldom fails to avail himself.

When Ioris left her presence that day she had gained her point with him so far that, although she still half-repelled, she had begun to startle and interest him, his thoughts were busy with her—a woman need ask no more. As for herself, the Lady Joan's pulses stirred as they had not done for many a day; the dullness and apathy that she had felt passed off her like a vapour; she had wanted something to kill, and she scented prey. Besides which she was already in love.

Her spirits rose at once; she rang and ordered her horse. She rode with great courage and skill; she flashed past Ioris like a meteor out of the gates to the open country. As he bowed to her in the sunset he mused to himself—

“Why did she confide in me?”

Reason and vanity both could give him but one answer.

There was a woman at that time who loved him well and whom he had loved well also—a countrywoman of his own. As he went to her, that night, he thought of those new strange darkling brows; as he sat with her, she—whose stars and sun and heaven and earth he was—

felt that his attention wandered and that his mind was absent.

When a woman like the Lady Joan is in love, escape for him with whom she is in love is not easy.

"She has the stride of a carabineer, the feet of a contadina, the teeth of a gipsy, the eyes of a tigeress, the manners of a fishwoman," he told himself: and thought so: and yet, do what he would, he could not forget the strange glitter of those eyes; he could not forget how he had seen this self-willed, daring, sun-browned rider from the Syrian Desert melted to tears and wooing his sympathy with hesitating words of confidence.

The very strangeness of the contrast heightened its enigma for him.

Long rides in the rosy summer hours, with the wind blowing over the flower-filled grasses; early mornings, when he carried her knapsack for her in breezy pilgrimages to forest sanctuaries or mountain heights; lonely evenings, when the guitar was got out and the people's ritornelli tried over to his teaching, with gay laughter and amorous gaze to suit the words; late nights, when the Turkish tobacco was smoked, and the Turkish songs sung, and the Turkish sequins glittered in the lamp-light on her dusky braids, and the shining fierce eyes glistened with fervid invitation and flashed with eloquent meaning—one by one these succeeded each other with feverish rapidity until their work was done, and he was whirled into a fancy as sensual as her own, if not as durable, and lost himself in it for a brief while, and woke to find the chains fast-locked about him and his place assigned to him for good and aye in the triangle of the Casa Challoner.

Of course gradually he became aware that the Croesus was a gentleman not too well off, and very fond of speculating in whatever chanced to come in his way, from

railway companies to Capo di Monte cups, and that the Brute was a person who would dine with him every evening and be shrouded amicably behind a newspaper after dinner; who would grumble and quarrel certainly about the soup or the salt or the servants, but who would never by any chance ask him if he had a preference for pistols or swords.

Of course little by little he became aware that a good many fictions had been spread out for his attraction, and that if anyone were a victim in the household it certainly was not the Lady Joan. Little by little he saw all this byplay and all the shifts and straits with which the Casa Challoner was kept straight in the world's eyes; and he grew so used to the inventiveness of his mistress that when she did chance to speak the truth he never believed her. But to all this knowledge he only came by such slow degrees that he grew used to it as it stole upon him; and in her passion for him he could not choose but believe—it was too jealous, too violent, too exacting, too terribly ever-present with him, for him to have a chance of doubting its vitality and reality.

There were times when his own exhausted passion roused itself, with infinite effort and with a weariness that was almost repugnance, to respond to the unending insistence and undying fires of hers.

A woman who is ice to his fire, is less pain to a man than the woman who is fire to his ice. There is hope for him in the one, but only a dreary despair in the other. The ardours that intoxicate him in the first summer of his passion serve but to dull and chill him in the later time.

Ioris, in certain passing moods, would think almost with a shudder, "Heavens! will she insist on these transports for ever?"

This evening, walking homeward, he felt tired of the day, tired of the evening. He had had so many like them.

He knew the songs by heart and the smiles too. The routine of the hours, so carefully balanced between the decorum that imposed on the little world she studied, and the amusement and abandonment that were the real delights of her nature, seemed to him wearisome and vapid. It was always the same thing. She could take a genuine zest in the small Tartufferies of the tea-parliament; she could take a sincere delight in the jokes of the Capranica and the jests at Spillman's. She had this supreme advantage—she loved the life she led in both its extremes. But he did not.

He had a contempt for the conventicle; he was tired of the theatre. He bore his share in both psalm and play because he had grown into the habit of doing anything that she dictated to him. But all the same he had too much good taste not to be tired of both.

He walked through the dusky shadows and across the wide white squares to his own little house on the bank of the river, down by the Piazza del Gesù. He let himself in, took the lamp that was burning in the entrance, and went up the staircase to his own favourite chamber.

The house was cumbered with busts and bronzes, and rolls of old tapestries and rococo, bits of china and carving, and broken fragments of sculpture. For it was in a manner the warehouse of the Casa Challoner, which could itself not decorously be strewn about with more things than would look natural.

He went up to his own room and threw his coat off and lighted a cigar. It was a pretty room, looking on a garden that in spring was green with lemon and orange trees, and had an old statue or two in it, and a wide-arched loggia hung with creeping plants.

There was one portrait on the wall among landscapes and weapons and etchings, relics of the time when he had been an art-student at San Luc's and a duellist in grey old Pisa.

It was a portrait with an Egyptian profile, a classic head, a cruel jaw, and a hard mouth; he glanced up at it and turned away with a sort of restless impatience at its presence there.

Indeed, it had no place of right there—being, as it was, the portrait of another man's wife. But it was not this scruple which troubled or distracted him. It had hung there for several seasons.

What made him feel impatient of it now was, that for the first time it occurred to him, with a chill, that throughout all the days of his life he would never be able to escape from the staring watchfulness of those menacing eyes.

He was like one of those magicians of fable who, having mastered spirits of good and evil for many a year in safety, at last summon from the nether world a spirit that defies his spells to banish it again, and abides with him, to his misery, growing stronger than himself.

This night he turned restlessly and uneasily from the gaze of the portrait, moved his lamp so that the picture was left in darkness, and took out from his bookshelves some old numbers of a great European review. He searched through them until he found certain poems signed "Etoile."

He sat reading until the lamp grew dim and the sparrows in his garden below began to twitter at the approach of dawn.

"Can it be possible that this woman has never known what love is?" he said to himself as he shut the book and went to his bed.

The morning had risen.

CHAPTER X.

"I WONDER what Voightel has told her?" thought the Lady Joan to herself on the morrow.

She felt a little uneasy—just as she had used to feel under the gaze of the great explorer's green spectacles on the housetop in Damascus, when the champagne was in the ice-pails and Mr. Challoner in his counting-house; and Voightel's little cynical, self-complaisant chuckle had sounded scarcely more welcome to her than if it had been the hiss of a cobra. She was uncomfortably conscious that Voightel knew much more of her than was agreeable to herself; besides, he was the bosom friend of that brilliant politician who had been trustee to her marriage settlements.

"I daresay she knows everything, and I'm sure she's good for nothing," she reflected at noonday; thereupon she dressed herself in her best, took out of her wardrobe with her Astracan furs an admirable manner—frank but not free, blunt but not bold, cordial and good-natured and high-spirited—which she kept on hand for people with whom it was not necessary to don the meeting-house clothes, yet with whom it might be dangerous to dress quite *en débardeur*; and thus arrayed, with her pleasantest smile shining honestly in her grey eyes, she drove herself across the city to the old palace by the Colonna Gardens, in which the Comtesse d'Avesnes had established herself on the previous day; and finding her at home, would take no denial from Etoile, but insisted on the friend of her father and of dearest Voightel passing the rest of the day with her. It would be such a charity. She was quite alone, she said: that Mr. Challoner was gone to Orbetello, and

Io—poor Io—was obliged to bore himself all day at the Court with some newly-arrived foreign potentate.

“Of course she must have led the very deuce of a life, but nobody would ever think it to look at her,” the Lady Joan reflected in perplexity as she surveyed her guest at her own breakfast-table. She was quite honest in her conviction. Given a woman with every opportunity to—amuse—herself, why, of course the woman had—amused—herself: every idiot knew that.

She did not like her guest. She could not make her out; she was irritated by her own suspicions that Voightel had told her disagreeable things; and though she liked patronising artists she did not care for artists of European celebrity when they were of her own sex, and were as proud as Lucifer, as she said angrily to herself, and looked round her rooms with eyes that seemed to her to detect at a glance the china that was mended, the canvases that were restored, the antiquities that had been made yesterday, and the Certosina that had been glued together last week. Nevertheless she made herself charming; got out some really good things, which she was never without in case any real connoisseur should happen to call; and over the plump quails, and light wines, of her breakfast-table was the very model of a clever, good-humoured, candid, and hospitable hostess.

No one could play the part better than she when she liked; and Etoile, won by her cordial good humour and bright intelligence, reflected that Voightel, when he was prejudiced could be very unjust. Great men can be so, as well as little ones, sometimes.

“Dear old Voightel!” said the Lady Joan fervently. “I am so fond of him. People call him a cynic, but I’m sure his heart’s in the right place. He was like a father to me in Damascus.”

She had hated Voightel; as a woman who loves adventures, yet wishes nobody to know that she has any, does hate a grim old ironical onlooker, with keen eyes watching through his spectacles and the raciest humour in Christendom, on whom all her prettiest fictions and sharpest devices fall harmless as feathers on bronze. But she had always met Voightel with both hands extended and the pleasantest of smiles. "Ah, *mein lieber Herr!*" she would always say to him with the frankest delight when they crossed each other in any of the cities of Europe. And Voightel would go and dine with her and enjoy his dinner—as, indeed, there was no reason that he should not; for it does not matter if you think very ill things of a woman, so long as she is good-looking and makes a fuss with you.

"She would pounce on me like a tiger-cat if she dared," Voightel would think to himself as she smiled on him and gave him mocha, Turkish fashion, and prepared with her own hands for him his water-pipe;—and it tickled his fancy so much that he was always at his pleasantest with her; so that though she knew that he did not believe in her one bit, she was quite sure that he liked her.

So runs the world away; and so, amongst all the spiders cheating all the flies, a spider makes a meal for another spider now and then.

Etoile, as she heard Voightel's praises, felt almost guilty for the guilty and absent man who had called this ardent and grateful friend of his the "Prose of Rome."

Before she could reply there entered the Count Mimo Burletta, plump and busy, his mouth full of new scandals and his hands full of new laces.

"Am I in your way? Is that your tailor?" asked Etoile of her hostess, in perfect good faith, not recognis-

ing him by daylight, and only seeing the filmy heaps of the laces he carried.

Lady Joan laughed, frowned, whispered hurriedly that he was an old friend—very poor—snubbed the ill-timed visitor and his laces, and dismissed him; then, thinking better of it, ran after him into the anteroom and consoled him, and told him, with a smile, that the Comtesse d'Avesnes had taken him for a man-milliner.

"*Maladetta sia!*" swore Burletta, dropping his laces in his rage, till he looked like a large fat ram dropping its fleece. "*Maladetta sia!*"

"With all my heart!" laughed the Lady Joan, and returned to her drawing-room, taking a piece of yellow Venetian point with her as a reason for her absence in the anteroom.

"A collar of Marino Faliero's," she said as she entered. "Isn't it interesting? Perhaps the very one he was executed in—who knows?"

"Who knows indeed?" said Etoile, with a smile. "But why not say Desdemona's at once? It would be more poetic."

The Lady Joan threw the lace aside crossly. She had a suspicion that Voightel's friend was laughing at her, and she did not like to be laughed at; moreover she preferred people who believed in Faliero, or in anything else that she might choose to tell them.

She had some odds and ends of real art and real history jumbled together in her brain like the many-coloured snips and shreds in a tailor's drawer in Spain. But they were all tumbled about pell-mell, and the wrong colours came up at the wrong time; and she had so unfortunate a preference for always dragging in the very biggest names and the very grandest events upon every occasion, that her adorer, Mimo Burletta, who really was

learned in such matters, was constantly made very nervous by her blunders.

"La Challoner is beautiful, noble, chaste—a very pearl and queen of women," he would say in his enthusiasm about her. "But she makes one little, very little mistake—a pot baked yesterday is always a vase of Maestro Georgio's; all her fiddles are Cremonas; all her sprigged china is Saxe, all her ugly plates are Palissy's; all her naked people are Michael Angelo's; all her tapestries are Gobelin; all her terra-cottas are Pentelic Marbles. Now, that is a mistake, you know; the world is too little for so very much treasure. She forgets that she makes her diamonds as cheap as pebbles. But she is a divine creature for all that," would the loyal Mimo always cry in conclusion.

At this moment she looked at the lace with regret. It was very yellow, very full of holes, and not very much coarser than what the women make every day along the Riviera. Why would her guest not believe in it?

"Would you mind driving me about to-day?" she said, glancing at the clock, reflecting that she might as well get something in return for this breakfast. "The ponies are tired. Mine?—no, they're not mine exactly: they're Io's; but of course I have them whenever I like. Yes, they're nice little beasts—little Friuli nags—fast as steam and surefooted as goats. They're very useful. Will you drive me? Thanks. Perhaps you will go with me to a few studios, if you don't mind? Of course it will bore you. You'll find it all second-rate, but to have your opinion will be such a treat to me and such an honour to them! Are you ready?"

Of course she carried her point and got into her guest's carriage and began a round of visits. She was not quite the Lady Joan of the bib-and-tucker, nor was

she quite the Lady Joan of the loup-and-domino, but the same adroit mixture of the two that she had been throughout luncheon.

She was sincere, in her eager invitation; she had a genuine zest in exhibiting any celebrity in her companionship. It gave her a *cachet* of talent. She liked to affect artistic society, her family had always done so; only, where they had had all that was greatest in all Europe to choose from, she had to take such offshoots of intellectual power as she could obtain. Sculptors who thought it high art to imitate in stone, schoolboys and sucking babes, cloth trousers and silk gowns; painters who cut colour like butter and like butter spread it with a knife, then called the mass a chord in colour or a prelude in carmine; clever writers who appraised their age aright, and saw that it needed not high purpose nor high thought, and trained their gifts accordingly, and, instead of dying like Keats or Buckle, took good incomes from great newspapers, and were not too clever for their peace or price—these and their like she would get round her, and make them useful to her in many ingenious ways.

But when a great fame came within her reach she grasped it eagerly, and always was the first to ask it out to dinner.

These pastilles of art and intellect burned in her rooms gave it a fine aroma, and she liked people to run about and say, "I met Pietra Infernale there last night; he means to have his illustrated *Furioso* ready by New Year;" or, "I dined at the Challoners', to see the Russian novelist, Sacha Silchikoff—wicked, if you like, but then how witty!" or, "I lunched yesterday with Lady Joan, and met Tom Tonans: he says there is no art nowadays in the R.A.—nothing but millinery and nursery elegiacs."

This kind of thing gave her house a smell of the

Muses and the Graces and took off any possible likeness it might otherwise have had to a *bric-à-brac* shop. Therefore, having now secured the friend of Voightel for all the remaining daylight of a fine mild afternoon, she drove up and down many streets, and went in and out many studios; smoked a cigarette here and there; and finally, at five o'clock, thought it better to wind up with a little *tableau* of respectability and begged to stop before an old dark house, in an old dark quarter.

—“I must make you know my dear friends the Scrope-Stairs,” she said entreatingly. “It’s their day, and I promised I would bring you if I could. You won’t mind coming, to oblige *me*? I’ve told them so much about you. They’re such dear, good clever people; and they’re dying to see you—dying!”

With which she went through the dusky doorway and began to mount steps innumerable and very steep and dark. Etoile followed her, unwilling to seem discourteous in such a trifle, and willing to please Lord Archie’s daughter when she could.

“I’ve told Io to meet me here. The Scrope-Stairs are so fond of him,” said the Lady Joan as she clambered up with agility to the fourth floor. “Oh, yes—it is an awful height; but they are so very ill off, poor dear people. Dear old Lord George managed to make ducks-and-drakes of five fortunes.”

She interrupted herself to put aside a dingy tapestry, and led the way through ill-lit passages to a large, dim, naked-looking chamber, where there were congregated in solemn congress some forty or fifty ladies of that age once described as somewhere between twenty and sixty, whose centre of attraction was a tea-table, about which they revolved as planets round a sun.

"How *do* you do, dears?" cried Lady Joan, kissing a great many of them one after another with ardent effusion. "Is Io come? No? Oh, just like him! Ah, I beg your pardon; how careless I am! Yes, I *have* persuaded her, you see. Let me present you to my friend the Comtesse d'Avesnes. You know her best as Etoile. Allow me——"

Lady Joan saw an electric shock of amazement, a nervous thrill of curiosity mingled with terror, palpitate through all her assembled friends at the name of Etoile—such a tremor of trepidation as thrills through a dovecote when in the blue sky hovers a hawk.

She enjoyed it amazingly.

Though so careful to conciliate Mrs. Grundy she cordially detested that august personage, and loved to "tie a cracker to her tail," as she phrased it, whenever she could do so with impunity.

"So honoured, so enchanted, so *more* than flattered! For years you have been our idol!" murmured the youngest of the Scrope-Stair sisters in a twitter of excitement, whilst old Lord George wandered in and made his dignified old Regency bow, and put his glasses to his dim eyes and turned a pretty compliment for the sake of Etoile.

"But will not people think it a little *odd* to see *her* in *our* house?" murmured the youngest sister, Marjory, a thin, eager person, with a fringe of hair above a nervous face; whilst her father occupied Etoile. Lady Joan filled her mouth with tea-cake.

"Oh, no, dear; she goes everywhere; she's hand-and-glove with Princess Vera. Of course there are very queer stories; but you know I'm never censorious. Where on earth can Io be?"

Marjory Scrope coloured; she always did so at a certain name.

"We have not seen him yet to-day," she murmured. "As for your friend, I am delighted. Only I thought Mrs. Middleway looked a little—a little—astonished. But you know best always, darling Joan; and anyone dear Lord Archie recommends——"

Mrs. Middleway was the wife of one of those Anglican clergymen whose flocks are all the straying Protestant sheep, black and white, who dance their cotillons, enjoy their masquerades, play their roulette, drink their pick-me-ups, propitiate heaven with their bazaars, and shriek at trumpery French plays, all over Italy in the winter-time, and of whom the Roman shepherd, or the Neapolitan beggar, or the Tuscan vinedresser, staring sullenly at them as they fly by on horseback, will generally mutter, "Non sono Christiani."

Mrs. Middleway was a large, faded, shabby woman, with two daughters to marry. She was extremely particular as to whom she visited, and had a very small income. She would stay at Fiordelisa in the summer, and if anyone hinted that, "Well, yes—well, was it not rather—rather strange, you know?" Mrs. Middleway would reply, "The dear Challoners? Oh! what a cruel censorious world we live in! As if the very openness of the friendship were not sufficient guarantee! Why, Lady Hebrides lunched there yesterday—I met her!"

But Mrs. Middleway being the soul of propriety, and having two daughters to marry, looked askance at the entrance of a celebrated person, whose name she was inclined to think synonymous with Tophet; wondered what that brown velvet gown had cost, drew herself up a little stiffer than usual, and murmured to her neighbour that that sweet Lady Joan was always so imprudently kind-

hearted; Lady Joan, judging by her own noble self, never would believe there could be anything wrong anywhere.

The neighbour, who was a very solemn spinster, with blue spectacles, who had written a very learned book upon the Privileges and Penalties of the Vestals, murmured back that society was so mixed nowadays that it was really dangerous to enter it at all; one never knew whom one might not be exposed to meeting.

"Ah, no, you may well say so. There is no line drawn," said the clergyman's wife, with a sigh, as she broke a tea-cake. "What *can* society be without a line?"

And she smoothed her shabby silk gown, and, good Christian though she was, could not help disliking a woman who wore brown velvet, silver-fox fur, and silk-embroidered cashmeres, and had old Mechlin lace at the hem of her skirt.

To the Countess of Hebrides such vanities were permissible; they were, like other evidences of the favouritism of Providence, not to be questioned in justice or propriety. But on only an artist!

"When one thinks how they *must* have been purchased!" she murmured to the spinster who had written the learned book on the penalties of the Vestals.

The spinster shook her head.

"Very wrong of Lady Joan to have brought her," she said, in a severe and choleric whisper. "*Here* one always was safe."

"Dear Lady Joan! she is so imprudent and so good-natured!" sighed Mrs. Middleway, and had her feelings further harrowed by a glimpse of the old Mechlin lace of the *balayeuse* underneath the immoral brown velvet of Etoile.

The glimpse she got of the Mechlin *balayeuse* filled

her with a kind of savage pain. Real old Mechlin!—sweeping the dust! These were the kinds of things that made it at times almost hard even for a chaplain's wife to believe in a beneficent Creator.

Meanwhile Etoile, unconscious of the emotions she excited, smiled on the antiquated homage of Lord George, wondered why she had been brought to this parliament of dames, and remained as indifferent to the stare of the fifty ladies as she was to the crowd on the Pincio, or to the *mostrari digito* at all times. The millclack of tongues grew very quiet round her; the tea did not circulate briskly, the muffins were not buttered with honeyed welcome; they did not like to talk before her; she had come from Paris, and had the reputation of a wit. Altogether she made them very uncomfortable.

"So kind of Lady Joan," whispered the clergyman's wife. "And so kind of the Stairs—they always *were* kindness itself—but it is a pity, because to *this* house everyone has always thought they were *quite* safe in bringing their daughters. Yes, a mistake certainly, though well meant, no doubt; but when one has young girls *can* one be too careful?"

"Delighted to have had the honour of receiving so much genius and so much brilliancy into my sad old house," said quivering old Lord George, with a bow of Brummell's time and his hand on his heart. He was a feeble old man, but had been very handsome in his time, and still knew a woman to his taste when he saw one. Lady Joan was not to his taste: only he never dared say so in his daughters' hearing.

"So charmed to have had such an honour, and any use we can be,—and we may be allowed to call, may we not?—and pray remember our Thursdays—every Thursday till June—though we may hardly hope that you will

deign," &c., &c., said Marjory, in her most fervent manner, her beads, and her trinkets, and her spare figure, and her little rings of hair all eager with courtesy.

Under these cordial valedictions Etoile went to her carriage wondering why she had been taken to these excellent folks.

Lady Joan's brow was stormy; it was half-past five, and her friend, the Prince Ioris, had not come.

She loved to take him there—in the first place, because it wearied him to death, and in the second because it amused her extremely to stride into that circle of "goody-goodies," as she termed them, with her hands in her pockets and her Prince at her heels. The incongruity of it tickled her fancy, and she knew how well it served her for all these matrons and spinsters to cry in chorus to any calumniators that she might have, "Oh! the purest friendship! The most innocent intercourse! Why, those excellent Scrope-Stairs receive them *together*—as if they ever *would*, if there *were*," &c., &c.

The Scrope-Stairs sisters were charmed to have him brought there at any price; he was their one court-card, their one riband of grace and honour. The "sex of valour" was never represented in their rooms save by some clergyman, or missionary, or unwary traveller caught in his ignorance, or on occasion by Mr. Silverly Bell, if he had any particular enemy that he desired to drown in the teapot, with Mrs. Grundy to say the *De Profundis* over the defunct.

Lord and Lady George Scrope-Stairs, with their daughters, were the chief mainstay and prop to that Temple of All the Virtues which Lady Joan had set herself to build. They were, indeed, very poor, but in compensation they were so eminently, so pre-eminently—respectable!

Not because their names were in "Debrett" and "Burke"—plenty of scamps are in both, who will hurt you very much if you are seen with them—but because from their fourth floor there went out an eternal odour of the very severest morality.

To have sipped of the tea from their teapot was to have been baptised with the waters of respectability for life, and to have eaten of their muffins was to have been sealed with the seal of purity for all time. True, their teapot was terrible as the cauldron of Macbeth's weird sisters, and hissed till youth and innocence, excellence and genius and honour were all stewing, cold, drowned things, in its steam. But what of that? Mrs. Grundy does not mind a little scandal—if you will only whisper it.

Lord George had been a dandy and a beau when the century and himself were both young; he had had big fortunes and spent them all, and had lived many years in exile, a sad and broken man; shivering by his chilly stove, and tottering out when the day was fine to have a mild little joke, when his daughters were out of hearing and any chance word awoke the old memories in him, as a trumpet-call wakes the spirit in the worn-out charger waiting death wearily between the wagon's shafts.

In his own house his daughters cowed him; they were iron to him though wax to the rest of the world; taking in the world's eternal comedy those indispensable but subordinate *rôles* known in stage-talk as "utility parts."

They were plain, *passées*, perfidious; but the people they toadied and the friends they flattered rather liked them the better for this.

If anybody wanted a schoolgirl looked after, a bore taken off their hands, a disagreeable errand done, or a train met on a rainy day, there were the Scrope-Stairs to do it.

Provided you were only quite a proper person, you could always have a Scrope-Stair to do what you wanted—from ringing your bell to slandering your enemy, from pouring out your tea to escorting your coffin. Their usefulness was of an elasticity quite inexhaustible, and their ingenuity in consolatory sophisms was as great as that of the chamberlain of Marie Leczinska, who, when she longed to play cards on the day of a funeral, assured her that the game of *piquet* was deep mourning. And, considering what a comfort they were, the Scrope-Stairs were not expensive—some drives, some dinners, some visits to you in the summer, some boxes at the opera in the winter—with these trifles these treasures were secured.

Lady Joan, whose unerring eye for her own advantage never misled her, had discerned the capabilities and the advantages of friendship with these excellent young persons when first she had wintered in Italy. She saw that they had not, like her, the power to make all men their brothers, but that they were exactly what was wanted to induce Society to let her enjoy herself with her brothers. Determined, like the spirited woman she was, to dance her Carmagnole over the conventionalities, she saw the necessity of having somebody to swear that she was only curtseying, and not dancing at all. So she instantly rushed into devoted friendship, kissed them all at every meeting, and wrote them a dozen times a week sugary little notes beginning “Dearest darling,” and ending “With a thousand loves.”

It was not the style that suited her best, but she could do it when it was wanted.

This effervescence had cooled down a little by this time, but it had left a valuable residuum; the froth was gone, but the wine remained.

The Scrope-Stairs had found out what her “thousand

loves" were worth, but they kept their knowledge to themselves; and, pouring out her tea on their Thursdays, continued to kiss and be kissed.

The loyalty of the Scrope-Stairs (whom the profane jesters of Society would call the Sweep-Stairs) was quite priceless in its unutterable value to the Casa Challoner. Indeed, but for the Scrope-Stair friendship Society might perhaps never have been friendly. But these young persons were so well-born, so decorous, so eminently estimable, so sternly respectable, and so stiffly irreproachable, that they really could have made Society accept even odder things than Fiordelisa, and stranger things than the Lady Joan, with her hands in her coat-pockets and her lovers behind her, striding in to a clergyman's tea-party.

They were, it is true, very jealous, very curious, very cruel, could slander viciously, toady rapaciously, and injure irreparably; but these were trifles, and were, indeed, quite lost sight of under the throng of amiable qualities which they developed for people richer than themselves. Their moral qualities were their strong point; they were armed *cap-à-pié* in every kind of virtue; they had even charity—when they were paid very well for it.

The old folks did not very cordially join in the charity. They belonged to an old-fashioned school, and did not understand the comprehensiveness of modern friendship, which means anything anybody likes, from rapturous love to deadly hate.

But their money was spent, their daughters were formidable, their home was dreary, and so they obediently did as they were told, and the old courtier put on his faded red riband to grace Lady Joan's respectable parties, and the old wife carried her knitting-needles and lambs-wool on to the terrace at Fiordelisa; and all was as it

should be, and their venerable names and persons were as towers of strength built up beside the Casa Challoner.

A bolder woman would not have cared for these things, and a sillier woman would not have known their value; but Lady Joan was not above using these trifles and turning them to good account. Even an old red riband, and a pair of knitting-needles, she knew were not weapons to be despised in her battle of life.

Lady Joan was like that well-trained elephant which can at will root up an oak or pick up a pin; and Lady Joan knew that there are many more pins than oaks, and that a pin stamped on too hastily may lame even an elephant for life. So nothing was too small for her, wise woman that she was.

A pattern of a new pinafore for an anxious mother; a damascened scimeter lent for a *tableau vivant*; a compliment at the right minute to an ugly woman; a young baritone allowed to scream himself hoarse over her guitar; a shoddy Croesus dazzled with the statesmen and the duchesses in her photograph-book; a frank, beaming smile in the face of a bore; a pressing invitation to a nervous nonentity; a flattering deference to a wealthy pomposity; a pretty set of conventionalities put on stiff and new like her ruffs and her cuffs; a present of fruit to folks rich enough to buy up Hesperides; a loan of the pony-carriage to people who owned great studs and rare racers in Suffolk or Norfolk; nothing wasted, nothing thrown away, everyone conciliated, everything remembered—herein was her success. She beamed on the old folks and the rich folks, no matter how they bored her, because they were solid as bullion, bought pictures, and were the St. Peters of the gates of Society. And she beamed on the young ones and the poor ones, because

who could tell what they might not turn out to be some day? The corporal's knapsack may hold the marshal's truncheon, and a little lad once trotted about with baskets of washed linen who lived to be King of Sweden. Thus she got her pæans sung in all stages of society, and broke down her oaks and picked up her pins, and made her path clear, and endured an amount of ennui incalculable, and listened radiantly to platitudes interminable, and made herself as agreeable to poor little Doremi screaming his cadenza and talking of his theatrical future, as to solemn Sir Joseph, with the face of a pig and the art-knowledge of a butler, and a huge art gallery in England, smelling of paint and plaister, and requiring many framed acres of "Guidos, Correggios, and stuff."

Of course all this cost her trouble, unending trouble. But she kept foremost before her the final words of Candide: "Il faut cultiver notre jardin." She had a passion-flower in her garden, of course; but her real care and culture were her cabbages.

She enjoyed her cabbages as much as her passion-flowers.

Whether she were sending her horse at racing pace across the grass that covers the dead Etruscan cities; or waltzing at topmost speed down the vast palace ball-rooms; or bargaining for old gems in dusky cellars of the Trastevere; or outwitting the Ghettoes in the purchase of brocades and canopies; or smiling in the faces of haughty or witty women whom she hated; or swinging through the feathered maize to call the lazy peasants to their duties; or launching shafts of malice through her black satin vizor at the Veglione—whatever it was that she was doing she did it with zest and force, and with a reality of enjoyment that was contagious.

Here was the secret of her success. To her nothing was little.

This temper is always popular with Society. To enjoy yourself in the world, is, to the world, the prettiest of indirect compliments.

The chief offence of the poet, as of the philosopher, is that the world as it is fails to satisfy them.

Society, which is after all only a conglomerate of hosts, has the host's weakness—all its guests must smile.

The poet sighs, the philosopher yawns. Society feels that they depreciate it. Society feels more at ease without them.

To find everyone acceptable to you is to make yourself acceptable to everyone.

Hived bees get sugar because they will give back honey. All existence is a series of equivalents.

"What do you think of my dear friends?" asked Lady Joan as they drove away.

Etoile hardly knew what to say.

"No doubt they are very estimable persons," she answered. "But I admit, a society like that is hardly what I am used to. I counted thirty-eight ladies, very ill-dressed, who I am sure were all muttering *Apaga Satan*, and most of them looked in a fierce state of warfare with a world which had failed to appreciate and—to marry them."

Lady Joan laughed.

"Oh, they're horrid old cats; I quite agree with you there. But cats scratch, you know. It's best to coax them. As for the dear Scrope-Stairs, I assure you to know them is to admire them; they are so 'indefatigable, so true, so charitable. I love them all so much!" she added, with an irrepressible grin on her handsome face.

"Besides, you know, women are so useful—haven't you ever found that out yet?"

"No; perhaps because I want nothing of them."

Lady Joan decided in her own mind that Voightel *must* have told her everything. Voightel never had;—but conscience is a magic-lantern that throws distorted figures on any white blank-wall.

"I think you are wrong," she answered aloud, with the odd candour which sometimes characterised this woman, who perhaps had been born for better things than she had achieved. "I think you are wrong. Nobody knows what they may want. Things hinge so horribly on accident. People who used to snub Louis Napoleon thought themselves quite safe; they were always afraid he should borrow a sovereign. I knew a man who gave him a drop of sherry out of a flask in a hunting field after he had had a heavy fall one day in Leicestershire; and twenty years afterwards that very drop of sherry got the man a concession for public works that brought him in half a million of money. There!"

"But surely he gave the sherry out of good nature, not calculation?"

"Humph! I don't know. He was not the sort of man to stop his horse to pick up a farmer. At any rate he did the civil thing, and see what he got by it. Now, that is just what I mean by being civil to women. They bore you; well, they bore me. I don't deny that. But they can do one so much good—just for a drop of sherry they can get you such a big concession."

"You would make a good political leader," said Etoile, with a smile.

Lady Joan was flattered; though perhaps she would not have been so much so had she seen into her companion's thoughts.

Etoile descended at her own resting-place and sent her horses home with Lady Joan, who, when out of her hearing, had them turned in the direction of the house of Ioris.

"The Prince not home yet?" she said sharply to his servant. "Well, tell him I've been here; and tell him if he's not in at half-past seven he'll get no dinner; we shan't wait for him."

The servant bowed humbly, and in his soul prayed heaven to send his master's *dama* an *accidente*.

Then she had herself borne again along the twilit Corso homeward, and laughed as she lay back amongst the cushions recalling the faces of the thirty-eight matrons and virgins around the sacred sun of the tea-urn.

"How scared they looked!" she thought to herself. "Well, it may all come in useful some day."

For Lady Joan was a long-sighted woman.

When Etoile went up her wide steps into the great palace, pale and melancholy with Overbeck's frescoes, she saw a coat lined with furs lying on the couch of the antechamber, and in the dusk of her rooms, that were filled with the aromatic scent of the wood fires, and burning pine-cones, a slender hand was held out to her, and a soft, melodious voice said:

"Will you forgive me that I ventured to wait for you? I could not bear to be turned away a second time."

The dark, delicate head of the Prince Ioris was seen fitfully in the gloom of the evening light.

CHAPTER XI.

DINNER at the Casa Challoner that night was on the table at half-past seven. The husband and wife sat down

alone. Her brow was as the thunders that rest on the brow of Soracte.

At a quarter to nine Ioris entered.

"I was kept late at the Casa di Risparmio," he explained. He endeavoured to awake their interest in that excellent institution, but vainly.

Lady Joan ordered up for him the shreds of the fish and the legs of the woodcocks. Such discipline she considered to be good for him. Mr. Challoner grumbled over his claret that the sauce had been ruined by waiting ten minutes for nothing.

It was a silent repast, only varied by scolding from the top of the table, as a long dull day of rain may be varied by mutterings of thunder from on high. They had many such. Life, when it runs on three castors, seldom runs upon velvet.

She was of opinion with Sganarelle, that "*cinq ou six coups de bâton entre gens qui s'aiment ne font que ragaillarder l'affection.*"

But, like Sganarelle also, she always premised that the right to give the blows should be hers.

CHAPTER XII.

"You must come up to Fiordelisa," said the Lady Joan with much urgency, a few days later.

Prince Ioris looked uneasy and ill-pleased, but, added with courteous effort: "Fiordelisa may be so happy as to interest you, perhaps, by its age and its story; its greatness has long departed."

"What can Fiordelisa be?" thought Etoile.

The Lady Joan explained, unasked, as she drove over

the Campagna. She was always explaining. Explanation is a blunder usually: whoever explains is, by self-implication, in error; but she was a mistress of the art, and found it answer with most people.

She lived in a state of perpetual apology. The meeting-house clothes were a standing apology for the cakes and ale.

It half-amused Etoile as she began to perceive it, and half-disgusted her. To a woman who was utterly indifferent to what the world said of her at any time, this struggle in another to combine self-indulgence with self-justification seemed the drollest of anomalies.

"Why not be Messalina, if it please her; or why not be St. Cecilia, if she liked it?" thought Etoile. "But why pass her life trimming up wrong as right, in sipping brandy and declaring it is cold tea?"

But that was the mistake of a careless and contemptuous temper; Lady Joan knew better. She knew that it was much wiser to pass off your cognac as souchong, and that you may take as much brandy as ever you like, if only you can convince everybody else it is tea.

When Theodore Hook wanted to get drunk, not to scandalise the club he was in, he called for lemonade—the waiters knew what to bring him.

Lady Joan called for cold tea so loudly that she might have been heard from the banks of Tiber to her own old hunting grounds by Abana and Pharphar. Those who waited on her knew what to bring her. Meanwhile that overgrown club, Society, was quite sure it was only tea.

Society will believe anything rather than ever believe that Itself can be duped.

If you have only assurance enough to rely implicitly on this, there is hardly anything you cannot induce it to accept.

Her society, having once decided to believe that Lady Joan only drank cold tea, were ready to go to the scaffold in a body rather than admit that she even knew the colour of brandy.

Her society was limited, indeed; but then it was the club she was in—the only one that mattered to her: all her dear passers-by that wanted teacups and tryptychs, and all her small gentilities and freeborn republicans that asked her to dinners and dances.

Besides, her brandy would not have tasted half so good if she had not had the fun of persuading everybody else it was tea. There is an indescribable delightfulness to a certain order of minds in smuggling.

She now proceeded to explain elaborately: Fiordelisa was Ioris' old castle, but they lived there; it helped him a little. Io was so poor; Io was so weak; they were so fond of him—poor Io! without her eye over him and Mr. Challoner's counsel he would be ruined to-morrow. Yes, of course, it did aid him very much, their living there; and they had done no end of good to the place. Such a wretched old barn as it had been when they had gone there first of all! Nobody could imagine the trouble she took! But then when she went in for anything she always did do it thoroughly; not like Io—poor Io!—who would never have a centime off the estate if she did not get it for him. How she slaved over those silkworms, for instance! such beastly-smelling things as they were; and she scarcely stirred out of the house for three months, she had to watch them so; but then she made three hundred pounds nearly by the raw silk in the year; and only think what three hundred pounds meant to poor Io! Thus she discoursed, whipping the ponies. She was so used to making the discourse that it ran off her tongue like her raw silk off the reels of the winder. More or less varied,

according to her auditors, it did duty to a thousand listeners in the twelvemonth's time, and induced Mrs. Grundy to submit to Fiordelisa, and even sometimes to visit there.

"The place was quite poverty-stricken when we came," she said, with a cut of the whip to the pony Pippo. "When we knew him first he was on the brink of ruin; *we* pulled him straight. Through extravagance?—oh, no, weakness. Io's as weak as water—give his head away if he'd got nothing else to give. Just like St. Martin and his cloak. He is like a child about business, too; a baby would wind him round its finger; he can't say no. If it wasn't for *me* he'd maintain all the ague-shaking souls of the Agro Romano, I'm sure he would."

"Is he duly grateful to you?"—Etoile, lying back in the carriage, began to pity the absent man vaguely.

Lady Joan shot a glance at her.

"Oh, I don't know," she muttered, a little sullenly. "He knows he couldn't keep straight without *me*, if you mean that. We've spent a great deal on the place too; but then we've got very fond of it. I've made three new *vignas* this year; got my vines out from Portugal. I grubbed up an old garden and planted it with Xeres. I shall make sherry in three summers more."

"And if your friend ever marry?" said Etoile, with the indifference she felt, only hazarding a natural conjecture.

The Lady Joan's eyes flashed as steel does in the rays of the sun.

"Marry!" She drew her breath and set her teeth, but in another moment she smiled.

"Ah, yes, I do so wish he would, if he married *properly*. But, you see, poor Io—well, he's very silly

about *me*; thinks there's nobody like me, and all that. But it's all nonsense. I'm always telling him not to be a goose."

"He lives in hopes of Mr. Challoner's euthanasia? And yet he lets Mr. Challoner plant his vines?"

"Bother you! How much has Voightel told you?" thought the Lady Joan, with wrath in her soul; but she laughed and grinned pleasantly. She had a trick of grinning, but then she had very handsome teeth to show.

"Mr. Challoner *die*! My dear, he'll live for ever! I believe he was cut out of a tree of *lignum-vitæ*. I'm sure he looks as if he had been. By the bye, he wanted to come to-day but some telegrams came in and kept him—heaven be praised for all its mercies! We get rid of him in the summer, you know. He goes to the German baths somewhere or other with little Effie; and Effie's Swiss governess. Have you seen that Swiss girl? Horrid little upstart; I believe she came out of a *café-chantant* at Vevey. Mr. Challoner chose her. Of course Effie's taught to disobey *me*, and lie, and be rude in all kinds of ways that she can. Oh, my dear, you don't know half the troubles *I* have to put up with."

"And people think Mr. Challoner such an excellent man! I suppose you did also once?"

"I—I always thought him the most odious cad in the whole universe. I've never changed about *that*," responded his wife, with one of those sudden bursts of temper and truthfulness which occasionally upset all her best plans and tallest card-house of conventionalities; then, conscious of a slip of the tongue, she coloured, and was glad that Pippo took to pulling.

"Io's very unhappy about you," she said suddenly. "He declares you don't like him—is it true?"

"Not at all; he has beautiful manners. I think him an admirable *laquais de place*."

Lady Joan screamed with laughter, well pleased.

"Won't I tell him that! Poor Io! I suppose you wonder to see him about our house so much; but, you see, he's very useful to us and we're useful to him, and he's all alone at home, and so——"

"I do not wonder at all."

Lady Joan was silent. She was revolving in her mind whether it was worth while to try and impose the fiction of friendship on a woman who lived in Paris and who knew Voightel. There were persons before whom Lady Joan threw off her meeting-house clothes and danced her Carmagnole in all the frank and boisterous abandonment natural to her. She wondered whether it would be safe to do it here. Etoile made her uneasy; she could not tell what manner of woman this great artist was.

A grave, 'studious, contemptuous contemplation that seemed to gaze at her from the eyes of her new acquaintance worried her, and made her feel unsafe and uncertain. Like all cowards, she was occasionally nervous. Etoile made her so. She desired to conciliate her; but she did not know how to do it. She desired to blind her, but she had a restless feeling that it would not be safe to do so.

All the weapons with which she was accustomed to fence with most people, and all the ruffs and farthingales with which she arrayed herself to please the meeting-house and Mrs. Grundy, seemed all of a sudden blunt and useless, coarse and foolish. She could not take them up and put them on with the fortunate mixture of swagger and propriety common to her.

"I wish she had never come near me," she thought

with a useless irritation, as she turned the ponies up the rough grassy road which led to Fiordelisa on this balmy and sunny morning of earliest winter; and she said aloud:

"I sent Io up after breakfast; he'll have everything ready, unless, indeed, he's given the luncheon to the dogs and the wine to a pack of beggars—which would be very like him," she added, with a laugh that was not easy or good-tempered, as she rattled the ponies up the sloping way between the reddening maples and the leafless vines.

Ioris came out of the wide-arched doorway to meet them as the ponies—his ponies—were pulled up before the entrance. He wore a black velvet dress; he had a broad-leafed felt hat in his hand; he had a red ribbon round his throat, and a hound at his side. He looked like an old Velasquez picture as the sun fell on his face and the depth of the shadow of the door was still behind him in the background.

"Take my furs. Io. Oh, how stupid you are!" cried the Lady Joan. "Do you know what the Comtesse d'Avesnes says of you? She says — (now, mind that basket!) — she says she thinks you are an admirable *laquais de place!*"

Ioris reddened under his delicate dark skin, but bowed low.

"I am glad that the Comtesse d'Avesnes can think that I have even so much small merit as that in me," he answered, lifting eyes of soft reproach. His eyes obeyed his will and uttered what he wanted for him more eloquently than most men's tongues will do.

"M. le Prince," said Etoile, with a smile, as she gave him her hand, "when I see you mounted higher in the social scale, I will accredit you with it. At present—mind that basket!"

Ioris gave an impatient gesture, and Lady Joan laughed, not altogether well pleased at the imitation of her tones and her order.

"How he will hate her!" thought the Lady Joan, consoling herself with the reflection as they strolled through the house on to the terrace, with the dusky wooded hills and the heights of Rocca di Papa behind them, and, before them, beyond the now leafless vineyards and the gardens golden with orange fruit and bright with Bengal roses, the width of the green Campagna, with the sun shining on the far yellow streak that was Tiber, and the purple cloud which they knew was Rome, dusky with her many roofs and ruins.

But for once Lady Joan was mistaken: Ioris was rather inclined to hate himself.

"Do I indeed look such a fool to her?" he thought constantly as they went through the house, showing her the various old pictures, and marbles, and tapestries, and Etruscan treasures found in the soil without. The old castle had lost much of its whilom magnificence, but it was very ancient, and had a noble and honourable melancholy in it which ill-accorded with the Lady Joan's cigar-boxes and ulsters, crewel work and caricatures, coats of new paint, and panes of crude glass; it looked profaned and disturbed, and had that air of resentment at its own profanation which ancient places do seem to wear under sacrilege, as though they were sentient things.

They lunched in the dining hall, where Lady Joan had arranged all her china, pottery, porcelain, and the rest on shelves, to be handy for the eye and purse of that much-suffering and largely-spending class of society, "the people passing through Rome."

Ioris sat at the bottom of his table, but Mr. Chal-

loner's wife sat at the top, and gave all the orders of the day, and chattered throughout the meal of her wines and her peasants, her fowls and her fruits. There was a portrait of the dead mother of Ioris on one of the walls. Etoile wondered that he left it there.

"Is Fiordelisa really yours?" she said suddenly to him when the Lady Joan had for a moment left them, her voice alone being heard from afar off in violent altercation with the henwife, who had let the last score of fowls be sold too cheap in the market.

"Fiordelisa!" he echoed in surprise. "Yes, certainly—it has been in my family twelve centuries."

"Mr. Challoner has a lease of it, I suppose?"

"Oh, no; I would never let it."

"You lend it to them, then?"

"Lady Joan does me the honour to like to use it—yes."

"And do your people like to be scolded?"

"Oh, that is nothing; they do not mind."

"But what right has she to scold them? Because she scolds you; is that it?"

"Because she scolds everybody and everything. Some women do," said Ioris, with a shrug of his shoulders.

Etoile smiled, and the smile made him restless. It was only amusement, but he thought it contempt.

From the other side of the tall cypress hedge the voice of Lady Joan came in strong anger, high above the cackle of poultry and the shrill outcries of the peasants. In another moment she appeared in sight, a mangled mass of feathers dangling from one hand and a hunting-whip in the other.

"Why will you let that beastly dog loose?" she said to Ioris. "He has killed two of my best Brahmas. I bought them only last week—forty francs a pair, and

such layers! I have told them if I catch him loose again I'll hang him."

Ioris looked up with a flush on his face. "You have never beaten Imperator *again*?"

"Haven't I?—within an inch of his life. He won't forget killing the Brahmas. What did you let him loose for? I told you he never was to be loose—great clumsy brute, breaking the plants to pieces."

"Cara Joanna! It is impossible to keep a dog always chained."

"Don't keep him at all, then. I shall hang him if I catch him loose, that's all. I have just told Pietro so, and he's sobbing like a baby, and Mariannina screaming!—I should think you heard them here. Break Imperator's heart? Rubbish! Break his bones, if you like. I shall if he kills my poultry. You are such an idiot, Io, about that dog."

And she went back as she came.

"Will you forgive my leaving you a second? I must look at the dog," said Ioris hurriedly, with the colour still in his cheeks.

"I will come and see him too," Etoile answered him. "But why do you let him be beaten? She can have no right to do that."

Ioris gave one of those gestures with which an Italian says, better than by all words, that what the gods will he must suffer, and their fiat is stronger than he.

They found the hound in his kennel, and he crept out timidly, and shivering still, with pain as with fear and fawned upon his master. Ioris caressed him, kissed him, called him endearing words, and did his best to comfort him.

"But why not have sooner protected him?" thought Etoile, watching the mutual affection of the man and the

animal, and making friends with the hound herself, whilst Ioris called to his land-steward:

"Tista, will you see to this? Take care that when the Signora is here Imperator is kept always in kennel. Of course he is to be loose at all other times; and if he kill or break anything, do you replace it, and keep it out of the accounts. I will pay you for it apart. Only take care that the Signora does not see him free, and that she never hears it if he hunts anything. You understand?"

"I understand his Excellency. But in the summer?"

"There are months before that," said Ioris impatiently; and, turning to Etoile, he excused himself for giving orders before her, and asked her to come round with him to see from another point of view where Rocca di Papa hung above in the fir-woods.

"Will you not let Imperator loose to come with us?" she asked.

"I could not do that. She would not like it."

"Is the dog hers, then?"

"No, mine."

"And you cannot do as you like with your own?"

He was silent.

"I heard all your orders to your bailiff," she pursued. "Forgive me; but, instead of all that complicated arrangement with him about the dog, would it not be straighter and simpler just to say to Lady Joan that you do not allow him to be beaten, and that you always wish him to be free? If she be only a guest, how can you object?"

Ioris sighed impatiently.

"Oh, that would not do with her. You scarcely comprehend. She is so used to have her own way—I could not displease her."

"Poor Emperor! And yet you seem fond of him."

"Emperor only bears what I do."

He muttered the words low, as if they escaped from him against his will, as they reached the little path that wound up into the hills amongst the myrtle-bushes, and the tufts of tramarina, and the wild growth of oleander which made the mountain-side a blaze of rose-colour in the days of June.

"What is the secret of Fiordelisa?" Etoile wondered, as the ladies of Craig Moira had wondered before her.

Fiordelisa was the Lady Joan's fee-simple of Ioris. Had he never let her within the walls of Fiordelisa, Liberty would not have outspread its wings and fled away from him.

Fiordelisa, crowning its hillside amidst cypress woods and olive groves warm in the light of the western sun, and facing the opal and amethyst lines of the mountains—Fiordelisa was the last bead of a long chaplet of noble strongholds once belonging to the great Princes of Ioris.

When Lady Joan had been seven months in Rome, still languid from the heats of the East, the summer in the city alarmed her. She averred that she would die of malaria, and that her lord was such a churl he would never give her the means to get a breath of fresher air.

The churl had but recently joined her, and could be represented in any colours she chose; and she, and the churl also, had breakfasted and lunched several times at that sunny solitary palace standing empty on the fair hillside, and the lust of desire for it had entered into her soul. Therefore she wept, she went into hysterics; she had even a week's fever.

Ioris laid the keys of Fiordelisa at her feet. What less could he do?

She affected reluctance; suggested danger from the

wrath of the churl; but in the end relented and accepted.

It was but a dreary old place, said its master, "and he sent up from the city all the modern necessities of daily life; had its mighty old chambers swept out, the wild garden put a little in order; sent his horses up there, and welcomed the wife of Mr. Challoner to a *villeggiatura*.

Figuratively, he had put handcuffs on his own wrists.

"What a madman!" thought Mr. Challoner when he heard of the arrangement; but aloud he said merely, "You are very good. Will it not bore you? No? I fear, indeed, my wife is not strong enough for travel. It is most unfortunate."

For Mr. Challoner of the unchanging countenance always bore himself to Ioris as he had done to his wife's friends in the East, with the grave face and the ceremonious manner with which one Roman augur of old addressed another augur in public.

Mr. Challoner was like Mrs. Siddons: he never left off the stage face and the stage tone even if he were only buying a yard of huckaback and inquiring if it would wash.

"Go to the castle," he said to his wife; "go to the castle, since you wish it, but take some good girl or other with you. Mind that."

And having thus made due provision for the safety of appearances, he departed for the baths in Germany, leaving his wife on the hillside—to recover her health.

People all wondered at the husband's complacency. They would not have wondered if they had been able to see into his recollections. Everything is comparative. Fiordelisa, as compared with Orontes and Euphrates, Abana and Pharphar, seemed to Mr. Challoner propriety

itself. He himself wondered very much at Ioris. But this is a bad compliment that husbands will always pay their wives.

Lady Joan's eyes sparkled as she crossed the threshold. Here was an occupation of territory that meant (to her far-seeing eyes at least) an annexation for life. Like Prussia and Russia, she only wanted to get her foot once across the frontier, and the soil was hers for ever and aye. Once installed in Fiordelisa, who should live, bold enough, or shrewd enough, ever to turn her out of it?

There are some women so happily constituted that they consider that for the gift of themselves all the treasures of earth would be scarcely recompense enough.

Lady Joan was one of these.

When he surrendered Fiordelisa he had surrendered his future into her hands.

He had not known it. But she had.

To dislodge a tenant unwilling to go is at all times difficult; the tiles must be taken off ere even law can aid. But a woman like the Lady Joan would sit still, bareheaded and fast-rooted, under the open skies till the tiles were put on again, and defy heaven and earth and all their elements to move her.

Possession is nine points of the law; and with nine points it would have been odd indeed if Lady Joan should not have managed, by hook or by crook, to obtain the tenth.

Ioris, with that touch of simplicity that a man's finest astuteness is always mingled with, imagined that he only lent Fiordelisa for a summer or two, Lady Joan laughed to herself to think how easily she had drawn away this trump card from him.

"Get *me* out!" she thought to herself. "Not when I'm once let in."

A great statesman being once asked what was the surest method of success, replied, "Immoveability."

Lady Joan understood the wisdom of the saying. When she installed herself at Fiordelisa gaily as one who only bivouacs for a midsummer picnic, she hung her cashmere upon the first peg she saw in the hall.

"There is my fee-simple for life," she thought.

What can any man do against a woman who, long ere a hint be given her, has resolved that she never will take one?

Ioris, who thought of his country as Musset did—"*Que les soleils de Juin font l'amour passager*"—in the midsummer months looked forward to a romance bright and brief as the life of the fireflies amongst the corn; a midsummer madness befitting the months when the oleander burns on the world like fire, and the nightingales sing under flowering myrtles. But Lady Joan knew better.

The castle was ancient, honourable, majestic: like an old greybeard who has lived long enough to see his children and friends all die before him. These old places, grand with the art and architecture of a statelier and freer time than ours, touch strangely poets, artists, thinkers—asses, as the Lady Joan would have said.

Its antiquity could not "scare" her nor its sanctity silence her.

She entered on its possession with the zeal of an encamping gipsy and the ruthlessness of an army of occupation.

She drew on a big pair of untanned boots, strode over the lands, marked the waste there was, and said to herself that she would soon alter all *that*. Before the summer was gone she had installed herself mistress there; before the winter had come she had taught its

master that she meant to be mistress and master both. When next the springtime came round she did not consult his pleasure, or feel any necessity for hysterics; she took for granted that she should go to Fiordelisa.

She did go. This time Mr. Challoner accompanied her, and took with him some packets of English seeds and the model of a kitchen-boiler.

The family installed itself at Fiordelisa audaciously as Tchiganes, sagaciously as Prussians. They cut walks, levelled trees, made the garden a fair imitation of the gravelled parallelograms of South Kensington, closed in the loggia with doors of coloured glass as nearly like a railway station as they could manage to make them; asked out English and Americans to dinner and breakfast, and began to interest themselves in breeding pigs and chickens.

"We've done so much for the old place!" said the Lady Joan, working a chair-cover, while her husband brought up Tegetmeier on Poultry.

"*L'audace, l'audace, toujours de l'audace*," was her motto; and it is wonderful how very far one may manage to go by a diligent adherence to it in the world, as in war.

Five years and more had now passed by since that first midsummer day when she had gone up as an occupant to Fiordelisa, and had turned out all the old pottery, and tapestries, and artistic lumber it was full of, with the zeal and zest of a victorious trooper ransacking a wine-cellar; and by this time the Lady Joan honestly considered herself the legitimate occupant of it, and would have looked on the establishment of any more lawful mistress there, as an invasion of her rights as grave as an Irish peasant regards a writ of eviction to be.

She had stuck her staff in the ground at Fiordelisa,

and never henceforth discoursed of it but as hers. When obliged to acknowledge the fact of its master's presence and possession she would allude to "poor Io" airily, as though he could not have afforded a dinner unless they had been there to give him one.

She set the china that she meant to sell on the shelves, spread the carpets he paid for on the floors, and then talked of how much she had done for him; invited people under his roof, and got credit for "such hospitality"; gave away his fruits, and eggs, and flowers, and wines, and was cited as "so generous"; and, further, amused herself throughout the spring with having out there to dine and to sleep every good-looking man who lingered in Rome and was glad to come and smoke under the stars in the old grey cortile.

Fiction is a greyhound and Truth is a snail. She set Fiction flying over the course. She had, indeed, once ordered out from England at her own expense two peach-trees and a Berkshire pig. It was all she ever had done; but, as everybody ate a peach and tasted the ham, and heard what she had done, everybody took all the rest for granted.

"I do so love my bees, and my beasts, and my pigs, and my poultry!" she herself would echo gushingly to the goody-goodies, to whom she was careful to appear as a kind of Harriet Martineau with a model farm of four (thousand) acres that was always, sleeping or waking, upon her mind.

"I am sure, most laudable," said the goody-goodies, quite impressed with the spectacle of a person born a Perth-Douglas absorbing herself in bees, and beasts, and pigs, and poultry. Higher society, less reverent and more *débonnaire*, laughed till it cried. But, whether leaving admiration or ridicule behind her, to Fiordelisa she went

when the April narcissus was in bloom. She conceived a kind of passion for the place, it was so useful to her.

That dual character in her, which Voightel had chuckled over, had full luxury of expansion both ways at Fiordelisa; all the various and opposing passions of her nature found vent therein at Fiordelisa—she could be Cleopatra at sunset and a huckster at sunrise.

With a guitar on her knee and amorous eyes shining under the passion-flowers in the court by moonlight, one side of her temperament had its sport and play; with her skirts tucked about her knees, a memorandum-book in her hand, and a fierce vigilance in every one of her searching glances, striding through granaries, wine-cellars, and cattle-stalls; pursuing missing centimes through columns of figures, and making the bailiff wretched for a lost franc, the other side of her had its fullest and sweetest sway also.

To be sure, she never reflected that one view of her might spoil the other to the person by whose permission she was there; she never reflected that the prosaic God of Business might take Love by the shoulders and turn him out of doors.

If Anthony had seen Cleopatra squabbling for a coin over a basket of fish or a basket of dates, he might probably have recovered his senses and avoided Actium.

But she did not think of this.

She had become so used to Ioris, and so certain of her dominion over him, that she had altogether ceased to preserve for him those graces of appearance which the woman who is truly wise never neglects before the man whose passion she desires to keep alive.

Familiarity breeds contempt in the lover, as in the servant.

Lady Joan's vanity made her too forgetful of one

supreme truth—that the longest absence is less perilous to love than the terrible trials of incessant proximity.

She forgot that love likes to preserve its illusions, and that it will bear better all the sharpest deprivations in the world than it will the cruel tests of an unlovely and unveiled intercourse.

She had committed the greatest error of all: she had let him be disenchanted by familiarity. Passion will pardon rage, will survive absence, will forgive infidelity, will even thrive on outrage, and will often condone a crime; but when it dies of familiarity it is dead for ever and aye.

The Lady Joan in her Oriental jewellery and her Asiatic dresses was a woman for Velasquez to paint, and most men to admire, and some to sigh for with ardour and desire. But the Lady Joan with thick untanned leather boots on, hair pulled tight from her face, and a grey skirt tucked up about her legs, or astride upon a donkey in a waterproof in muddy weather, counting the artichokes and tomatoes before they went to market—Lady Joan was not a woman to adore or to portray; and Ioris, artist as Nature had made him, and lover as he was expected to be, opening his window in the lovely rosy dawn and looking down on her thus occupied, would sigh and wonder whatever he had seen—why ever he had sacrificed himself;—and so, tired, and nerveless, and discontented, and afraid to show his discontent, he would go down his staircase and into the radiant balmy morning that itself outshone all the dreams of all the poets, and would hear her delighted voice ring out, “Seven robins and a nightingale shot before breakfast, Io! What do you think of that?” and dared not say what he thought of it, but had to smile and praise her skill, and look at the little pretty ruffled blood-stained heap of

feathers; and submit to have the hand that was black with the cartridges passed through his arm to draw him into the loggia, where the morning meal was spread; and had to take his coffee and fruit seasoned with stories of how Nannia had been caught sneaking off with a stolen cabbage, and how Pepe had been detected filling his pockets with green peas as he had weighed them; and all the while to himself watched drearily the silver threads that the light found out in his mistress's hair, and wondered why she dressed so shabbily because she was in the country, and thought how large her hand looked as it plunged amongst the strawberries, and felt vaguely that this was not the companion fitting to that old sunlit, air-swept, flower-scented loggia, with the roses round its columns, and beyond its arches the wide blue hills.

But she did not dream of this; she dug and planted, and bought and sold, and planned and bargained; she kept a sharp eye on the weights and measures, she ran up model styes and breeding-pens; she got up at five to count the potatoes and melons, the cherries and cabbages that went to the market; she rode his horses, and ordered his bailiffs, and strode about in grey linen and big boots, and did on the whole most admirably—for herself.

No doubt if he had overheard her explaining to her English and Americans how all this was done only out of charity, to help "poor Io," it would all have speedily come to an end. But then he never did hear—except just what was meant for his ear.

He had an uncomfortable feeling that it was all disagreeable, and tedious, and noisy; and he prized the affection of his peasants and farmers, and their irritation under the new reign oppressed and saddened him. In his remembrance there might have been a great deal of waste, but there was a great deal of feudal affection. In

other years at his annual visits there had been only smiles, laughter, music, rejoicing; now there were often rebellion, discontent, imprecations, and sullen silence.

Of course, however, she, like all other great improvers, was not to be daunted by such a trivial thing as poor folks' devotion and mere clinging to old landmarks. She brought her new brooms and swept away with them vigorously; and if the brooms caught at such old trumpery tapestries as custom, tradition, and loyalty, and pulled them down in fragments, so much the better, she thought; she cared for no old rubbish—that wouldn't sell again.

He sighed and let her sweep on.

Meanwhile Mr. Challoner was always careful to set the seal of his presence, with his flower seeds and his kitchen boilers on the private life of Fiordelisa, and at the beginning of each summer was always to be duly met with by any passing visitors gravely contemplating his wife's poultry-pens or solemnly watering his own stove-plants, and in his pursuit of those innocent occupations would always find some occasion to say, in an abstracted manner, leaning over a model pig-stye, "Yes, yes, we have done a good deal for the place; my wife is never so happy as when she is doing good; yes, we brought over those Berkshires. Nothing like English breed nothing."

Society thought Mr. Challoner very amiable and strangely blind.

Mr. Challoner suffered neither from amiability nor blindness. He quarrelled incessantly with his wife about everything else, little and large; but he never quarrelled about Ioris.

What could a blade of steel in a wintry dawn have given Mr. Challoner of vengeance comparable to that which he smiled grimly over as he saw another man,

daily and hourly, bullied, ridiculed, stormed at, ordered about, driven to account for every absent hour, and deprived of every vestige of a will of his own?

Mr. Challoner was like the Dauphin who kept the luxury of a whipping-boy.

Vengeance!—

*N'allons pas chercher à faire une querelle,
Pour un affront qui n'est que pure bagatelle!*

There was no one living on earth to whom Mr. Challoner owed so much comfort as he did to Ioris. And, indeed, he would say, with quite a cordial ring in his voice, "Ioris? Oh, a very good fellow—the best friend we have!"

A quiet, excellent woman, who was his father's widow and no relation to him, but whom he called his "mother," because it is always so respectable to have a mother, would occasionally, on visiting at the Casa Challoner, observe with disquietude the Lady Joan disporting herself in a break full of masks on Giovedì Grasso, or going out shooting, with her gun, and her hessians, and her Roman nobles; and on such occasions old Mrs. Challoner would murmur to the master of the establishment, "Puir laddie! it's a great name and a braw house to have married into, and that there's no denying, but I'm thinking, my poor Robert, that you have paid a muckle price for the gentility."

"Joan has high spirits; it is merely high spirits," Mr. Challoner would return with an austerity that closed the discussion.

For Mr. Challoner never told anybody what price he had paid, whether muckle or mickle. He had never given any living soul the right to say that he was other than a most contented husband.

He had made his bargain with his eyes open, and

the bargain had been that he was to keep his eyes shut. And he fulfilled it loyally.

Now and then he winced—now and then he smiled. But it was only to himself. Lady Joan, who quarrelled with him to his face, and railed at him behind his back, could not resist a sort of admiration for his impassibility. “The creature might be cut out of wood!” she said often. Now, a wooden husband is the most convenient of all lay figures.

This winter afternoon the real master of Fiordelisa, with his guest, strolled upward by the hill-paths bordered with aloe and cactus, and shaded with cereus and cistus, towards the yet higher lands of Fiordelisa, where the stone pines reigned alone with the tall lilac heather at their feet.

He strove to understand, to interest, and to amuse Etoile, and he succeeded. He had at command graceful thoughts and picturesque diction; he loved art, and had studied it profoundly. He had been irritated because this stranger, herself eminent in the world’s sight, seemed to think him a slave without power or purpose, and the unlikeness of her to any other woman that he had ever known stung him to interest and moved him to exertion.

Ioris, like many men before him, had sunk into an existence in which his mind had no share.

It was as nearly brainless as a naturally intelligent man’s life can ever be.

To obey all his ruler’s desires; to attend to the thousand and one trivialities that she daily imposed; to see that what she ordered was done, and what she wanted found; to follow her hither and thither; to avert the tempest of her temper by prevision of her wishes, and to be careful that his servants, his horses, his house, his patience, his presence, his endurance, his exertions were all ready to the moment that she might call on them—all this made

his day one incessant and joyless routine of obedience. He woke in the morning with the dreary round before him, and he lay down at night seeing nothing better for the morrow, or for fifty hundred other morrows, if he lived long enough to have them dawn on him. Such a life killed his intelligence. The pure impersonal efforts of the mind may be heightened by a great joy and may be deepened by a great sorrow; but a life of perpetual triviality, yet of perpetual conflict—a life, in a word which has been condensed into the one common comprehensive word of *worry*—does so irritate and yet benumb the faculties that all intellectual effort dies out under it. It had been so with him.

Lady Joan was no fool; but she was one of those women who lower all they touch more than many fools.

No delicate thought could live under one of her loud laughs; no impersonal discussion could survive her boisterous personalities. Art itself looked ridiculous beside her pretentious patronage of it and mercenary traffic in it. And the obliquity of her mental vision seemed to communicate itself to those about her till in her presence a praying angel of Mino da Fiesole's soiless marble looked no better than a squat bronze from a Chinese temple. As there are women who exalt all that comes in contact with them, so did she lower all things.

It was not her fault. Nature had made her so.

But the effect on the mind of Ioris had been that of smoke on painting: it had dulled all the colour and obscured all the lines.

A certain lassitude crossed by a certain irritation had grown on him; and the scholarship of his early youth, and the proficiency of art which had distinguished him at one time, had died down into silence and obscurity.

They were not needed for the wrangles of the house

he frequented, and the scenes of barter that he was called upon to assist at in antiquity shops.

With Etoile they awoke. For the man who is a scholar by culture will never altogether lose delight in it, and the temper that is born with the poetic element in it will never absolutely fail to answer to the right touch. It becomes like a harp whose silver strings are covered with dust, entangled, jarred, and mute; but are still silver, and still keep song in them when they are struck aright.

Not such a song, indeed, as when the chords first were strung, for time and wrong usage have done much to mar them; but still a song—a song sadder than tears sometimes.

The hill-paths were steep and the way long, but it seemed to have been short to them both, when at last they reached the pine-wood, where Rocca di Papa was visible. High above hung the little grey tower on the rock where Juno once stood to watch how the battle went; at least, we believe so, if we hearken to Virgil; and if we will not believe Virgil what right have we in Rome at all?

The sun was bright on the Volscian hills, and the snow on the line of the Leonessa and on the heights of the Sabine mountains glowed like an opal in the light. The low lands looked dusky and bronze-hued from clouds that hung above them, and a purple cloud shrouded the wild dark mountain of Soracte and floated midway between earth and heaven—far, far away was a glancing line that showed where the sea was beating on the sad sands by Ostia; and aloft, white and stern as an Alp, rose Monte Gennaro, who wraps his mantle of frost around him till the maize is tall in the plains, and the girls are singing amongst the poppies. And in the centre of it

all was Rome, with the cross of St. Peter's clear against the light, and all the vast cloud-world around it.

There is no view on the earth like this from one of the heights of the mountains of Rome.

Etoile looked and was silent. The great tears gathered in her eyes, but did not fall.

He watched her.

"You feel things too much," he said softly.

She had forgotten him; and she looked up with the surprise of a sleeper awakened from a dream.

"Oh, no, I think not," she answered him. "I pity those to whom the world is not so beautiful as it is to me."

"And yet there are tears in your eyes."

"Are there? I cannot tell you—you, who have always lived here, cannot know, I think—all that one feels in looking so on Rome. One seems to see as God sees—all the hosts of the dead arise."

He was silent. The words moved him. He bowed his head and stood in silence, like one who will not break in upon a woman at prayer.

At that moment his name echoed shrilly on the clear air. He started and listened.

"Forgive me," he said quickly. "She is calling us. In a little while it will be dark."

"Where on earth have you been?" said the Lady Joan, with her face black as a lowering thundercloud as it loomed upon them through the lines of the tall polished laurel trees. "Where on earth have you been, Io? The idea of climbing up here! and without me! I asked for you everywhere. The coffee is cold, and we shall have to pitch-dark to drive home; and there is that young diot's opera to-night. What could you be doing up here all this time?"

"We have consoled Imperator; and we have trodden in the steps of Juno," Etoile made answer for him; and she looked Lady Joan straight in the eyes as she spoke.

There was something in the look of contempt and of challenge: she herself was unconscious of it, but the other was alive to it.

"If she dare to cross me here!" thought Lady Joan; and her brow darkened in storm and her eyes glittered till they were green as an angry cat's. She was sullen and silent as they descended to the house and drank the coffee which was awaiting them in the square stone court.

Fiordelisa was the apple of her eye.

It was not, perhaps, very dignified work—squabbling with peasantry, counting potatoes and beans, ousting old folks from little territorial rights, keeping a sharp eye on the olive-presses and the wine-tubs, and hunting up the Cochin China eggs out of the straw and thatch.

But what would you?

John Vatices, Emperor here in Rome, gave his wife a costly crown of emeralds and diamonds that was bought with the proceeds of his poultry, and why should not the hens of Fiordelisa lay rings of sapphire and earrings of turquoises?

Lady Joan pulled on her thick driving-gloves with a jerk before the coffee was fairly drunk. Ioris and Etoile were talking gaily and laughing together.

"I am sorry to hurry you," she said coldly. "But the moment the sun goes down the nights are so bitter. And Io has a fancy, you know, for us to hear the new opera. A boy, who lived in a dirty little poking town of the Maremma has dreamt that he is Mozart and Rossini combined, and Io devoutly believes in him. Io's geese are all swans."

"A more amiable optimism, at any rate, than the common one which swears there are no swans at all—only a few ducks in a pond," said Etoile, taking her coffee from him.

She smiled at him as she spoke. Almost insensibly she felt drawn into defending him against these persistent mockeries, which had so little wit or wisdom in them.

"Perhaps we *are* only ducks," she added. "But we are always grateful to anybody who will believe in our snowy plumage, and who will vow for us that our stagnant little pond of vanity is a lake in which the mountains of the world are mirrored. Who is this young composer come out of the Maremma?"

"A boy of great genius," said Ioris; "very young—only twenty-two. He has had no education, except a year in Bologna; but he has, with many faults, many excellences. This is his first opera. It is on the theme of Persephone. Parts of it are very fine; and I think the choral renderings——"

"It is hideous rubbish," said Lady Joan, roughly. "Just singsong out of Verdi and Gounod, and the 'infernal' part of it all borrowed wholesale out of 'Lohengrin'—growl, growl, growl—bang, bang, bang—that's all. Besides, it's been done in *Orphée aux Enfers*."

"That is not quite the same thing," said Ioris, with an involuntary smile.

"The same story," said Lady Joan confidently, turning to Etoile. "The opera's stuff. But the boy happened to get hold of Io last year; and Io thinks he knows counterpoint and all that; and so he's flattered, and believes in the trash, and uses all his influence to get the opera put on the stage of the Apollo. I daresay, if the truth were known, the dresses and things have come out of his own pocket. If he'd only a crust he'd give it to the first

creature that squealed out for it. Oh, you know you would, Io, if I didn't keep you straight. Give me a cigar. No, there's no time for more coffee. See they put those grapes in; I want them for the Bishop of Melita. And they're to kill that sheep for me to-morrow. Mind Tista don't forget. And they'd better shoot a few hares and send me them with the mutton in the morning; there's that big dinner we have to-morrow, and Majory wants one to jug for her father. And mind you tell the man to get that fence done by Monday; and if the blacksmith don't come and put the padlocks on those gates directly I won't pay him one farthing—not one farthing!"

"If I didn't see to the things *he* never would," she explained as she took the reins of the ponies. "He'd let people dawdle on for ever, and pay 'em just the same for doing nothing. They know I won't stand that nonsense. I've had all the gates put up and padlocked: the whole land used to lie open."

"The people here must be very fond of you," said Etoile.

Lady Joan did not feel the satire.

"Oh, I don't know. They ought to be. I physic 'em when they're ill. Such wry faces they pull! Of course I'm very kind to 'em all; but first of all one must make a thing pay—in Io's interests, you know."

"And you are of opinion with Zoroaster that to reap the earth with profit is of more merit than to repeat—or win—ten thousand prayers?"

"I am rather of Plutarch's," said Ioris, joining them, and stroking his ponies.

"Was Plutarch an ass, then?" asked the Lady Joan with supreme scorn.

"*You* would have thought him so; he could never

bring himself to sell in its old age the ox which in its youth had served him faithfully, *Voilà tout.*"

"That is just the sort of sentimental stuff to please you. The ox would make very good beef," retorted the Lady Joan. "Mind! my sables are over the wheel."

She cut the ponies sharply over their heads with the whip and started them off full gallop down the rugged slope, leaving their master to spring up behind as best he might. The ponies were his own: spirited little cobs from Friuli, with jingling silver bells, and swinging foxes' tails hung at their ears; but no sort of possession was he allowed to enjoy of them.

"I want Grillo and Pippo to-day," he would say of a morning; and his groom would answer, "I am very sorry, Excellence, but the Signora has ordered them." Ioris had to shrug his shoulders and see his ponies depart to the Casa Challoner. Why did he never rebel? He began to ask it of himself, leaning with his arms on the front seat of the carriage, looking at the profile of Etoile before him in the twilight.

"I do so wish you would come to the theatre to-night. Do change your mind. There are only the Plinlimmons at dinner—bores, I know; but we should cut it short with the Opera," urged Lady Joan as she stopped the ponies to set her guest down in the Quirinal Square, and pressed an invitation which she knew was quite safe, since she had chanced to hear that Etoile would pass that evening with the Princess Vera, who had "two or three people"—*i.e.*, about two or three hundred.

"The idea of her going to Princess Vera's!" she muttered as she drove away. "Preposterous!"

"Why that?" said Ioris, lighting a cigar, as the ponies dashed down the street of Four Fountains.

"Good gracious, Io! can you want to ask? But Princess

Vera will know any artistic trash that takes her fancy—rude as she can be to every respectable person.”

And she slashed Pippo across the ears again. She herself was among the respectable persons whom the Princess Vera treated with a calm ignorance of their existence very exasperating.

The ponies rattled up the steep stones to her house; and her husband, who was just then going in at the door, stopped, aided Ioris to unload her furs, and hoped they had had a pleasant day at Fiordelisa.

“Are you disposed to let Lady Norwich have your turquoises?” asked Mr. Challoner, ten minutes later, following his wife into the privacy of her own room.

“Yes, she may have ’em. I only bought them to sell again.”

“I thought of saying two thousand francs?”

“Yes—that won’t be bad. I gave eight hundred; but then the woman was hard-up at Homburg, you remember, and glad to let ’em go cheap. I grudge ’em to that old cat. Mind, she thinks we brought ’em from Persia, and had ’em polished in Vienna.”

“You’ll never do better with them: I think it is a very good price.”

“Tolerable. And they don’t suit me. Blue’s for blondes. Besides, they’re nasty uncertain things: one never knows they won’t change colour. What about the Urbino jar?”

“I got it. It is genuine. An incomparable bit. You always make horrible mistakes, but you did not blunder there. The fellow had no idea of the value of it. I bought it like a common bit of kitchen pottery.”

“Yes, I know—the man kept his sugar in it.”

“By the way, old O’Glennamaddy wants an antique altar-screen.”

"Very well. We haven't one; but Mimo shall draw one, and little Faello can carve it. It can be ready in twenty days. O'Glen is a goose—he'd take anything."

"Yes. But people are not all geese that will go to visit him. Remember that. You had best show him good things."

"Don't you preach. I know O'Glen as I do my alphabet. He used to give me burnt-almonds when I was a baby. I say—mind you go yourself about that little Pietà to that man in Trastevere. Io was going, but I wouldn't let him; he never beats the people down; and he talks some rubbish about the man's wife being ill with the ague—as if that had anything to do with it! That's just like Io. He bought a little plate of Gubbio ware yesterday; the woman that owned it asked him fifteen francs, and he went and gave her seventy—seventy!—just because the thing was worth it—so he said; but I believe it was only because she was crying about her landlord pressing for rent. That's just like Io—cry a little, and his hand goes in his pocket in a second."

Mr. Challoner smiled grimly.

His wife was very fond of airing her contempt for her friend's weaknesses before him. Not that there was the slightest occasion to do so. Mr. Challoner had left all remnants of jealousy long buried in the delta of Orontes and Euphrates, of Abana and Pharphar. And besides, there was such perfect confidence between his wife and himself that there was never any need for explanations.

"I have boundless trust in her," he would say austere-ly with injured dignity if some old friend, too officious, ventured to hint that Lady Joan was a little—a little—perhaps a little too original. And, like all people who have boundless trust, he would shut his eyes when bidden.

This kind of business-conference was a closer tie between them than any the marriage-altar could forge, and at discussions of this sort they were always good friends, finding each other's views and principles often identical. Indeed, so sound were his wife's ideas about business that Mr. Challoner could use his pet phrase with perfect veracity when speaking of her.

"You'll come to the Opera to-night?" asked the Lady Joan now.

"No—no."

"Oh, you'd better. The Norwiches will be there, and that old cat Plinlimmon is coming with us. They'll all talk if you don't."

"Very well," said Mr. Challoner: he was always resigned to self-sacrifice for the public good. "You told them at Fiordelisa that I should bring Lord Norwich up to shoot on Monday?"

"Yes. Mind, though; Norwich thinks we've bought the place. You'd better make a party and take up a cold luncheon. Echéance will go, and Plunkett, and Gualdro Malestrina, and perhaps some of the *attachés* would if you asked 'em, though I hate all that *Chancellerie* lot—stiff as pokers! By the bye, since we put up the trespass-boards all round, the game's in much better order. Io protests, and says the people will knife him for it some day, because they've always netted the hares and birds as they wanted them; but that's all rubbish, I think. Anyhow, they shan't get a head of game if I can help it. There's such heaps of partridges! I shall have 'em trapped for market when we've had the pick of the shooting. I wish you'd write to England about those pigs; and tell 'em to send out some pink kidney potatoes for planting—the Early Emilys are the best. Io settled that bill for the last, and never struck the wharf-duties

off it, though I told him the shipper ought to pay them; but he's always so careless about money. That's the door-bell, isn't it?—that horrid Plinlimmon woman—she's got-up like a parrot, green and red and yellow and blue, I dare say. What a nuisance it is to have to do the polite! Go in and say all sorts of things to her while I dress."

Mr. Challoner went in obedient and welcomed the Plinlimmons, who were very rich people, who had made a vast fortune by a new kind of candle, warranted never to melt or to splutter, and fulfilling its warranty nobly. He apologised for his wife's tardy appearance, and quite affected the Plinlimmons, who were simple, sentimental folks, oppressed with the extent of their own wealth and their own ignorance, by the tender manner in which he regretted his wife's imprudence in being out so late in the cold, thereby endangering her lungs and his happiness—but she was so wilful, and so fond of art, and so charitable—and she had been visiting a poor painter, who had been laid up with fever, &c., &c., &c.

From painters to painting is a natural transition, and led naturally to the sight of some landscapes which were on sale for a charity, and which the Plinlimmons fell in love with, and begged might be sent to them at the Hôtel Constantia; and so the time was whiled away until the Lady Joan entered, radiant in amber, and black lace, and Etruscan ornaments, and greeted her dearest Mrs. Plinlimmon with that cordial and honest warmth which was her greatest attraction to shy women and timid men.

Then there entered silently without announcement one whom Mr. Challoner presented to the good Monmouthshire folks aloud as "our valued friend—the Prince Ioris," and, with a *sotto voce* whisper, "A Spanish duke as well as a Roman prince—a godson of the Pope's."

And the valued friend bowed with a calm, ceremonious grace not common in Monmouthshire, and said some courteous phrases in French, and then fell back and gazed at Mrs. Plinlimmon in her gorgeous attire with grave amazement, and murmured to himself, '*Dio mio! Dio mio!*'"

"You must be very civil to 'em; they're awfully rich—made pots of money by candles," whispered Lady Joan in his ear as she bade him fasten her bracelet.

He had learned what people who were rich meant in the Casa Challoner, and was silent.

He was ordered to give his arm to the Plinlimmon daughter, who had red hair, and was dressed in green; and he failed to comprehend a word of her French, and wished those stupid, ill-dressed islanders would not come to bore him; and felt more tired all through the dinner than he had ever done in all his life.

"How absent you are, Io!" said Lady Joan sharply as the Fiordelisa woodcocks went round.

"Ioris is thinking of Mademoiselle Etoile," said Mr. Challoner, with a grim smile. "You have often heard of Mademoiselle Etoile, no doubt, Mrs. Plinlimmon?"

And they discussed Mademoiselle Etoile with asperity, as became people at whose table she had dined six nights before.

Ioris sat silent, with a flush on his face.

Lady Joan looked at him from time to time with suspicion—it was not possible that he was really thinking about anything but herself?

"What is the matter with you to-night?" she muttered roughly as she rose to go to the Opera.

Ioris shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, *ma chère!* when you weigh me to the earth

with a red-haired demoiselle, with teeth like a wild boar's and the bones of a giantess!"

Lady Joan laughed and told him to hold his tongue; they were as rich as Croesus. Then, quite satisfied, she let him fold her cashmeres about her and take her to the carriage.

A very vain woman is always so easily lulled into contentment.

She ridiculed every note of the 'Persephone' all the way through it, because it amused her to do so, and because she had begrudged the money he had spent in helping the boy-composer of it. But Ioris, sitting in the shadow, scarcely heard her. He was thinking of the sunset on the hill under Rocca di Papa.

He was glad when the tedious evening drew to its close and left him free.

Meantime the Plinlimmons went to their hotel, enchanted with having met a live Italian Prince, and such attention from so charming a household, and when they should depart to be in time for the assembling of Parliament (Plinlimmon being member for a borough), would tell everybody that the Casa Challoner was the most delightful house in Rome. To shy people the Lady Joan's ardent cordiality was unspeakably precious, and to ignorant people her extensive artistic allusions were unspeakably imposing; besides, she was really a Perth-Douglas. To nervous persons who have made candles such a union of rank and good-nature as she presented was altogether irresistible.

"Yes, yes; they were chosen for us by a friend of ours, Lady Joan Challoner; she'd just got the like for her own cousin, the Countess of Hebrides," Mrs. Plinlimmon would say before many objects of Italian art in her London reception rooms; and would feel happy and glorious

in the possession alike of high art and high acquaintances. Such general felicity could a clever woman diffuse only by smiling and selling a few trifles.

The Lady Joan was catholic in her sympathies in society, and obeyed the mandate of Edward the Third to his ladylove—

Bid her be free and general as the sun,
Who smiles upon the basest weed that grows
As lovingly as on the fragrant rose.

For the Lady Joan never forgot that there are weeds by which an attentive gatherer has before this discovered a vein of gold in common soil, or found a fortune in a pool of borax.

She knew that after all it is *l'infiniment petit* that is infinitely great.

A woman like Etoile will be blind to this. She will be touched instantly by pain; she will be moved to quick charity; she will be capable of strong deed and deep thought; she will answer trust or appeal as a golden harp the player's touch; but the small things of life will pass by her—what is antipathetic to her she will offend by unconscious neglect, what is distasteful to her she will turn hostile by careless disdain; she will go through the world doing good where she can, cleaving to what seems to her to be truth, and seeking unwittingly only what responds to her own temperament; so the world is set thick with foes for her, as the path of the jungle with snakes.

Lady Joan was a proud woman in her own odd fashion, and it hurt her pride bitterly sometimes to do so much homage to the *Infiniment Petit*; but she did do it, and she secured the suffrages of all the little people who wanted to look great, of all the frogs who wanted to be bulls, of all the geese who wanted to be swans, of

all the free and enlightened republicans who flew to a title as a moth to a light, of all the small gentilities who were nobodies in their own counties at home, but abroad gave themselves airs, and had quite a number of figures to their bank balance—in francs.

It hurt her pride sorely, yet she did it; and, like everybody who is wise in his own generation, she reaped her reward in kind.

When the Norwiches dined there on the next night Lady Joan was different in character. The Norwich people were great, solemn, stupid, and of vast influence. He was a marquis of long descent, she the daughter and sister of a duke; they were very fussy, very pompous, very proud. Lady Joan dressed herself in rigid black velvet, and only wore a string of pearls; she was very quiet, looked classic and handsome; talked of her child, showed only really good things, set Ioris at the far end of the table, and spoke, if at all, distantly of Fiordelisa as "a place we go to in the summer. Mr. Challoner likes farming."

For the Norwiches, and such persons as the Norwiches generally, Lady Joan was as much of a gentlewoman as she could be—nervous a little, a little abrupt, too anxious for approval, and too careful to conciliate, but otherwise quite irreproachable.

The Norwiches and such people as the Norwiches, going home, would say: "That daughter of Archie's lives at Rome. Oh, yes, we dined with them; oh, yes, grown a very agreeable woman too—quite quiet; a good mother, and seems to agree with that person she married very well. Oh, of course we dined there. One must always stand up for a Perth-Douglas."

Now and then, indeed—for no human mind is so godlike that it can altogether foresee and prevent every

accident—the Norwich people, or the people of whom Lord and Lady Norwich were types, were startled by coming suddenly across Lady Joan, without her bib-and-tucker, tête-à-tête with Ioris at some marble table in a Paris café, or some green bench at an open-air concert at Spa, when business had obliged her to travel, and she had mingled business with pleasure: the real Lady Joan without meeting-house clothes on; the real Lady Joan who was Cleopatra by moonlight up at Fiordelisa; the real Lady Joan who came home from masquerades at five in the morning; the real Lady Joan who sang and smoked, with a dozen men about her, half the night; and this real Lady Joan would startle the Norwiches and other decorous personages a little unpleasantly and give them a sudden sensation as of sea-sickness. But she would whip on her bib-and-tucker very lightly and quickly, and would explain: "I'm on my way to join Mr. Challoner, and he don't like me to travel alone; so he sent Ioris to meet me. Io only loses my money and gets the wrong labels stuck on my boxes; and of course I could travel by myself from here to San Francisco, but Mr. Challoner is always so fidgetty."

So she would adjust bib-and-tucker before the café mirror; and the Norwiches, or the type of persons they represented, would be satisfied, and say to each other, "You see her husband knows it; there can't be anything in it," and so would go and see her in the winter, though they had had that awkward view of her eating her *sorbet* with the handsome Italian beside her, smoking his cigarette—a situation which would have ruined any woman of less resources and her ready invention. But in truth the Lady Joan was Protean, and slipped in and out of a dozen various skins as easily as a lizard slips out of its tail.

"Why do the great ladies go to see our Prince's *dama*?" said many a good Roman matron of them all standing at one of the fountains in the wall to gossip with her neighbours as the carriages swept by to the Casa Challoner.

They did not understand it.

They were not aware of the golden rules of good society.

Paollotto, the baker, had a handsome wife, who betrayed him for Franco, the Swiss Guard, with the fair curls, on duty at the Pope's Palace yonder, and Paollotto's wife set out at nightfall once too often; and Paollotto following fell upon fair Franco with a knife and slew the Swiss ere he had time to point his halberd. That they could understand. That was Roman and righteous—just as much so as if it had been the other way, and it had been the Swiss who, by God's grace, had killed the baker. Anything, so that it was man to man, and good steel used about it.

But then they are barbarians still in old Trastevere.

If Paollotto had been trained in good society he would have only smiled on Franco of the yellow curls, and asked him to speak fair some upper scullion, so as to get the Paollotto loaves ordered and taken for the Vatican kitchen, and so have warmed his oven if his heart were cold, and made his loaves of lighter weight, having the Papal patronage and blessing. Poor Paollotto drew his knife instead; and as he went through the streets between the Guards to pay his penalty Lady Cardiff, who was passing by, looked at him and asked what he had done; and hearing, smiled and said, "Vengeance is out of date, like flour, my poor fellow. We have ground bones and Friendship."

CHAPTER XIII.

"It's lasted some years, but I don't think they can be very well suited," said Lady Cardiff, watching through her eyeglass the forms of Ioris and Mr. Challoner's wife pass away down the vista of her own numerous rooms, after a visit of ceremony on her day. "I don't think they can be very well suited; he looks like Romance, and she like the Money Market. The Eros he would choose would be a soft, tender god of silence and shadow; and hers is a noisy little Advertising Agent, with handbills and a pastepot. Very bad form, by the way, to *afficher* publicity like that."

Etoile, who had become somewhat intimate with this merciless speaker, and who had just then entered, reddened a little.

"You dine often with her, Lady Cardiff!"

"What a tragical tone of reproach! No, my dear Comtesse, I don't dine there often. Far from it. I find it too expensive to have to buy a pan or a platter, or some ugly *magot* or other every time after dinner—it would come cheaper at Spillman's. She amuses me though. Clever woman—knows how to suit herself to her society, and *never* knows when she has a rebuff. How useful that is!"

"Surely she never suffers one?" said Etoile. "Everyone appears to like her." A sentiment of loyalty to her absent old friend and to the woman whose hand she took in friendship moved her to a defence with which her convictions did not go.

Lady Cardiff smiled and dropped her eye-glass.

"Oh, of course people like her. She'll bore herself

to death. There's no more popular quality. Besides, she has such a tower of strength in that excellent husband of hers. Of all lay figures there is none on earth so useful as a wooden husband. You should get a wooden husband, my dear, if you want to be left in peace. It is like a comfortable slipper or your dressing-gown after a ball. It is like springs to your carriage. It is like a clever maid who never makes mistakes with your notes or comes without coughing discreetly through your dressing-room. It is like tea, cigarettes, postage-stamps, foot-warmers, eiderdown counterpanes—anything that smooths life, in fact. Young women do not think enough of this. An easy-going husband is the one indispensable comfort of life. He is like a set of sables to you. You may never want to put them on; still, if the north wind do blow—and one can never tell—how handy they are! You pop into them in a second, and no cold wind can find you out, my dear. Couldn't find you out, if your shift were in rags underneath! Without your husband's countenance, you have scenes. With scenes, you have scandal. With scandal, you come to a suit. With a suit, you most likely lose your settlements. And without your settlements, where are you in society? With a husband like that wooden creature Mr. Challoner, you are safe. You need never think about him in any way. His mere existence suffices. He will always be at the bottom of your table and the head of your visiting-cards. That is enough. He will represent Respectability for you, without your being at the trouble to represent Respectability for yourself. Respectability is a thing of which the shadow is more agreeable than the substance. Happily for us, society only requires the shadow."

With which Lady Cardiff, wittiest of women by heri-

tage, as her grandmother had frightened Fox and almost awed Sydney Smith, crossed the room and lighted a fresh cigarette.

"And love," said Etoile, "where does that come in your arrangements?"

"Olives and sweetmeats, my love," said Lady Cardiff. "I am talking of soup and fish and the *rôti*—and of the man who pays for them. Young women don't think enough of the *rôti*. They fall in love with some handsome ass who makes court to them after the style of French *feuilletons*, and they believe life will be always moonlight and kisses. Once married, he spends all their money, damns them a dozen times a day, and keeps his smiles for other houses, while ten to one he is as jealous as a Turk to boot. Moonlight and kisses are excellent in their way, but they should come *afterwards*. They are only olives and sweetmeats. You can't dine on them. Those pretty trifles are for Paolo and Francesca, not for Mr. and Mrs. Rimini. I am very immoral? My dear Comtesse, I am only practical. An easy husband, who never asks questions or cares where your letters go—ah! you must have been married to a Lord Cardiff, as I have been, to know the blessing of *that*. With an easy husband you have all the amusement of doing wrong and all the credit of doing right."

"In this case, indeed," she went on, "it is that poor Ioris who pays for the *rôti* as well as the *bonbons*, which is hardly fair. But that does not matter a bit to Society—Society will always go to dinner so long as the husband sits at the end of the table. Disgraceful? Oh, well, perhaps; but if the husband like it we have no business to say so. Of course Belisarius knew Antonina once danced in nothing but a zone, and had always had a weakness for big biceps; but if Belisarius liked to make-

believe that Antonina was a piece of ice incarnated, Byzantium was bound to make-believe so too, and to know nothing about the zone and the biceps. You do not see it? Of course not, because you are a great artist and do not trouble your head to understand Society. You live on Olympus. We are mere mortals."

"That is severe, Lady Cardiff."

"No, my dear. It must be a great thing to have Cloudland to resort to if Society turn one out of doors; but to poor ordinary humanity, that has no heaven beyond the card-basket, Society has a weight that you people who are poets never can be brought to comprehend. I believe that you really are all happier if your card-basket is quite empty, because nobody ever disturbs your dreams by ringing at your door-bell."

The Marchioness of Cardiff loved to call herself an old woman. But she had kept three things of youth in her—a fair skin, a frank laugh, and a fresh heart. She was a woman of the world to the tips of her fingers; she had had a life of storm and a life of pleasure; she turned night into day; she thought no romance worth reading save Balzac's and Fielding's; she did not mind how wicked you were if only you never were dull. She was majestic and still handsome, and looked like an empress when she put on her diamonds and sailed down a *salon*. On the other hand, she would laugh till she cried; she would do an enormity of good and always conceal it; she honoured unworldliness, when she saw it, though she regarded it as a kind of magnificent dementia; and, with all her sharpness of sight, the veriest impostor that ever whined of his misery could woo tears to her eyes and money from her purse. She always wintered in Rome, and never lived with Lord Cardiff. He and she were both people who were delightful to everybody else,

but not to each other. She was a Tory of the old school and a Legitimist of the first water; she believed in Divine right, and never could see why the Reform Bill had been necessary. Nevertheless, Voltaire was her prophet, and Rochefoucauld her breviary; and though she saw no salvation outside the *Almanach de Gotha*, her quick wit almost drove her at times near the wind of Democracy. Anomalies are always amusing, and Lady Cardiff was one of the most amusing women in Europe.

"Smoke. Why don't you smoke?" she said to Etoile. "You make me think of Talleyrand and whist. What a miserable old age you prepare for yourself? You look grave, *ma chère Comtesse*. What are you thinking about?"

"Pardon me. I was thinking of my friend Dorotea. She is blameless, and the world is cruel to her. Yet in these women you talk of the same world makes a jest of dishonour. Why? It is unjust and capricious."

"When was the world ever anything *but* unjust and capricious?" said Lady Cardiff. "Still, do you mean to tell me, really honestly, *sans phrases*, that the Duchesse Santorin is faithful to that brute and spendthrift?"

"Entirely faithful; entirely blameless—yes."

"Dear me!"

Lady Cardiff was so amazed that she walked the whole length of her room and back again. It was late in the day, and her visitors and courtiers had all departed; she and Etoile were alone.

"It is no *use*, you know," she said at last; "nobody'll ever believe it."

"Dorotea's actions are not shaped by what people believe."

"Dear me!" said Lady Cardiff once more.

"When one gets amongst these kind of people one

is all adrift," she thought to herself. "They have such extraordinary ideas."

"But there was great scandal about Fédor Souroff. You can't deny that," she said aloud.

"Count Souroff has a great and loyal love for her—yes. But he obeys her. He is in the Caucasus, trying to lose his life, and failing, of course, as all do who wish to lose it."

"How very uncomfortable!" said Lady Cardiff. "Then everybody was wrong, and she don't care for him?"

"That is a question I can have no right to reply to, I think."

"You mean she *does*? Then she'll call him back from the Caucasus, my dear; and goodness knows why she sent him there. You believe her, and I believe you, but nobody else would. *Nobody!*"

"Why not?"

"Oh, nobody, nobody! You know everybody says the worst they can now. They won't let her sing at Court in England this season."

"And yet——"

"And yet our dear Lady Joan can go to Court. Oh, yes; and Mrs. Henry V. Clams too, and ten hundred others like them. You don't seem to understand. Your friend may have Count Souroff killed and buried in the Caucasus. It won't make any difference. Society has made up its mind."

"And why? What has she done, except be innocent?"

"Oh, dear, dear! what *has* that to do with it?" said Lady Cardiff, vexed as by the obtuseness of a little child to understand the alphabet, and thinking to herself, "One can't tell her it's because the woman is an artist—she's an artist herself."

"It seems to me the main question," said Etoile as she rose and gathered up her furs.

"That is because you live in Cloudland, as I tell you," said Lady Cardiff. "Who cares what Joan Chalonier is or is not? She has got a well-trained husband, and we have to receive her, though we grin behind her back. Who cares what your beautiful friend is or is not? She has got a bad name, and she will be hanged for it, like the poor proverbial dog that had one. You seem to me, my dear Comtesse Etoile, to take life far too terribly seriously. To your poetic temper it is a vast romance, beautiful and terrible, like a tragedy of Æschylus. You stand amidst it entranced, like a child by the beauty and awe of a tempest. And all the while the worldly-wise, to whom the tempest is only a matter of the machineries of a theatre—of painted clouds, electric lights, and sheets of copper—the worldly-wise govern the storm as they choose and leave you in it defenceless and lonely as old Lear. To put your heart into life is the most fatal of errors; it is to give a hostage to your enemies whom you can only ransom at the price of your ruin. But what is the use of talking? To you, life will be always Alastor and Epipsychidion, and to us, it will always be a Treatise on Whist. That's all!"

"A Treatise on Whist! No! It is something much worse. It is a Book of the Bastille, with all entered as criminal in it, who cannot be bought off by bribe or intrigue, by a rogue's stratagem or a courtesan's vice!"

Lady Cardiff laughed and wrapped the furs about her guest with a kindly touch.

"The world is only a big Harpagon, and you and such as you are Maître Jacques. '*Puisque vous l'avez voulu!*' you say,—and call him frankly to his face, '*Avare, ladre, vilain, fesse-mathieu!*'" and Harpagon answers

you with a big stick and cries, '*Apprenez à parler!*' Poor Maître Jacques! I never read of him without thinking what a type he is of Genius. No offence to you, my dear. He'd the wit to see he would never be pardoned for telling the truth, and yet he told it! The perfect type of genius."

Etoile went home thoughtful, and with a vague sense of trouble upon her.

She had taken as a residence part of an old palace, entered from the Montecavallo, but with all its great windows looking into the Rospigliosi gardens. The rooms were immense, vaulted, noble in form and proportion, with frescoes that were beautiful with the gorgeous fancies of some nameless artist of the days of the Carracci. Here she installed herself for the winter at her ease, and here she felt as if she had already dwelt for twenty years. Of one great chamber, with deep embrasured casements, she made her favourite apartment, half-studio, half-salon; and filling the embrasures with palms, and ferns, and flowers, and burning oak logs and dried rosemary on the wide hearth, and getting about her the picturesque litter of old bronzes and old brocades, of casts, and sketches, and books, made tranquilly her home in Rome.

She missed the strong intellectual life that had surrounded her in Paris, the keen and witty discussion, the versatile talents, the brilliant paradoxes, the trenchant logic of that section of the world by which she had been surrounded; but in return she felt a dreamy and charming repose, a sense of peace and exhilaration both in one; thought was lulled and basked only in the immemorial treasures of the past; strife seemed far away, and the mere sense of physical life seemed enough.

She regretted that she had not come unknown to all

the motley winter world that ever and again broke the charm of this spell which falls on every artist and every poet entering Rome. She thrust it away as often as she could, but she had celebrity, and it had curiosity, and it buzzed about her and would not be gainsaid. She would fain have shut herself alone in her frescoed rooms when she was not amongst the marbles of Vatican or Capitol, or beneath the ilexes of Borghese and Pamfili. But it is not easy to escape from the world of ordinary men and women, or to escape publicity, when you have a public name; and people were eager to visit Etoile and say that they had seen her at home, with her olive velvet skirts, and her old Flemish laces, and her background of palms, and her great dog on her hearth, and on her easel some sketch half-covered with some relic of gold brocade.

"As they must come some time, let them all come together, and not spoil the week," she said, with a shrug of her shoulders, and named Sundays for her martyrdom.

"I will not come on Sundays," murmured Ioris as he heard her say it.

Etoile smiled. "Oh, yes, you will—if your sovereign-mistress order you to accompany her."

"*Plaît-il?*" said Ioris, with a look of innocent unconsciousness; then added, in a low tone, "You are pleased to be cruel."

The Casa Challoner itself received on a Wednesday, making on that day a solemn religious sacrifice to the Bona Dea. It was specially swept and garnished, morally as well as actually; the pipes and cigars were locked up, the too-suggestive statuettes put out of sight; the good-looking slaves all banished; and little Effie, prettily dressed, was prominently petted by her mother; Mr. Challoner was as cordial and communicative as nature would

permit him to become, and Lady Joan was as full of proper sentiments and domestic interests as if she were a penny paper or a shilling periodical. In her bevy of English dowagers, American damsels, and Scotch cousins, amidst the bankers', and consuls', and merchants' wives, the small gentilities and the free-born republicans, Lady Joan was sublime: she would have been worthy the burin of Balzac and the crowquill of Thackeray.

Ioris was usually banished from these Wednesdays, but Lady Joan would generally speak of him once in five minutes. "Io's gone to get me some camellias," or "Io's gone to look at some pictures." Or she would turn over the photograph album before Mrs. Grundy and say, "Yes, that's Io—you met him here last week. Handsome? Well, we don't think him quite that, but we're very fond of him, poor fellow."

And Mrs. Grundy would go away quite satisfied, and take her daughter on the following Wednesday; for Mrs. Grundy will suppose anything rather than it were possible for anybody to deceive herself.

"Showed me the man's likeness openly, her husband standing by and the dear Bishop," Mrs. Grundy would say afterwards. "Of course there's nothing in it—*nothing!* Do you suppose she would show me his photograph if there were? It is the purest friendship—the most perfect kindness."

All the bankers', and consuls', and merchants' wives, all the small gentilities, and the free-born republicans, who did not go to the Sundays on Montecavallo, used to compare her admirable Wednesdays, with the teapot and the small talk, to those iniquitous Sabbath-days.

"They say you can't see across the rooms for the smoke at the Comtesse Etoile's—there are all kinds of liqueurs—anybody plays and sings that likes. The

Prince of Scheldt sung heaps of *café-chantant* and guard-room songs last Sunday, and imitated Teresa and then cats on the roofs—oh! scandalous, quite scandalous! They say——”

And being shut out from the Sundays, they would go and take the tea and muffins on a Wednesday, and feel what a blessing it was to move only in irreproachable society.

“Yes, *I* don’t go on the Sundays either; at least, I go very seldom,” said Lady Joan, and let a shade of regret on her frank face hint the rest.

“The Etoile Sundays are delightful,” said Lady Cardiff, who did go, and was reassured that she had done quite right in going by meeting Princess Vera in the doorway, and another ambassadress a little further on. “I like her very much—I like her immensely; though she never does seem to see that Somebody is Anybody, and was contemptuous, actually *contemptuous*, to the Prince of Scheldt; while she was everything that was amiable to some horrid little snuffy creature, eighty years old, who happened to have all Beethoven and Schumann at his fingers’ ends. Yes, I like her. She seems to look over one, through one, past one; and that isn’t comfortable or complimentary; but pleases me. She isn’t a bit like anybody else. She makes me think of Sappho and St. Dorothea. What are you laughing at, pray?”

Ioris, despite his protest, did come now and then on the Sundays, but he came alone and rarely.

To Etoile he said: “You have said I am a slave; I will not exhibit myself with my chains on to the merciless raillery of your eyes, and—I do not care to come when others monopolise you.”

To Lady Joan he said: “Ah, *ma chère*, you know I am

afraid of 'celebrities.' Leave me in peace. I see her too often as it is in your house for my tranquillity."

That was no lie; but his hearer did not understand it in its true sense, and was pleased and satisfied.

"Io won't go near her if you drag him with ropes," she said to her watchdog, Marjorie Scrope.

The watchdog with a keener and sharper *flaire*, had already smelt danger.

And once, twice, thrice the watchdog going to copy the Rospigliosi Aurora, on an order of Lord Fingal's, saw a tall and slender form that she knew pass the palace-gate of Etoile in bright mornings at noontide.

CHAPTER XIV.

"BOUGHT it for eight hundred francs, and can sell it, my dear madam, for a hundred thousand, honour bright!" the O'Glenamaddy, an Irish member of Parliament, was calling out in highest glee in the Lady Joan's morning-room. "Two men scrubbin' the dirt off all day long, and two dozen sheets of waddin' used already—it's almost clane—and it's a real great picture! What school, madam? Oh, it's not a picture of a school at all—it's a 'Salutation to the Virgin,' madam, twelve feet by twenty. Who by? Ah, now, that I'm not shure of, but it's a very old master. Cara—Cara—Caradoggia, I'll be thinkin'. Count Burletta says I'd get a hundred thousand to-morrow for it aisy; but I'll not be selling it. I'll send it home to the ould place. It's a wonderful place, madam, is Rome, for pickin' up treasures in the dirt, and I cannot be grateful enough to ye for having put me in the way of doin' it. With a little ready money, and a little knowledge, it's wonderful what a fortune one may make. Not

that I'm wantin' one; but when one has children there's never too much broth in the old pot—is there, now? Only eight hundred francs my picture!—think o' that! Say, countin' cleanin', and the waddin', a thousand all told. And lyin' without a purchaser ever since the conquest of Italy by Bonaparte; and such a mass of soot and dust, that if your good husband hadn't pointed out the value of it to me I'd have taken it for a chimney-board and nothin' better. Indeed I would. What a thing it is to be clever! And didn't ye say ye'd take me to a new shop to-morrow mornin' that ye know of?—that is, I mane, an old shop. I love an antique bronze, madam, better than anythin' in the world—mighty old, ye know, madam, and green as grass, with plenty of pattern on it."

"You mean patina," said the Lady Joan, repressing a smile. "Dear O'Glen, of course I shall be only too delighted to take you anywhere or serve you in any way; and about the picture I'm enchanted. Such a find as that don't occur once in a dozen years; and if Mr. Challoner hadn't been so fond of you he would never have let you run off with it. I'll come and see it to-morrow, and bring Io. And now you must stop for luncheon. I've got some real Southdown thyme-fed meat for you; I sent over for the breed myself. They'd such wretched, long-legged, fleshless beasts at Fiordelisa when I went there first! *Now* our mutton fetches far and away the first price in the market; indeed, Spillman buys it up always."

"What a treasure of a woman ye are!" sighed the O'Glenamaddy. "Ye know everything, from antiquity to mutton! Quite amazin'! Ah, sir, ye've drawn a prize indeed in your marryin'; and few prizes it is that there are!"

Mr. Challoner bowed—gratified.

The O'Glenamaddy could not stop for the mutton, being very busy, and post-haste on his way back for the

opening of the Dublin season; and the Lady Joan was not ill-pleased that he could not. The O'Glenamaddy was a delightful person, of a childlike faith and an elastic purse, but she had had enough of him. Moreover, she expected Etoile to luncheon, having organised a party to the Grotto of Egeria, and she would not have cared for her to hear of the Salutation to the Virgin and the sheets of wadding.

She herself was in high spirits, having received a rather chillily-worded invitation for herself and husband, and their friend the Prince Ioris, to go up and breakfast with her mighty cousins the Hebrides, who had just come to their big villa outside by the Porta Pia. But she did not mind its being chilly; it would serve her purpose as well as if it were warm. A single invitation to breakfast or dinner at the Countess of Hebrides, always filled Mrs. Grundy's mouth with sweetmeats and silence safely for the season. True, neither the Earl nor the Countess of Hebrides liked her, and asked her as little and as coldly as possible to their house. But what of that?

Lady Joan floated herself by means of her big relations as swimmers in a storm by air-belts. Cousins very near to her might come to study art in Rome; but if they studied it in humble dwellings, and had no taste or figure for Society, their relationship was sternly rejected at the Casa Challoner. But when cousins removed twice a hundred times, as Scotch cousins can be, came with pretty handles to their names, and cousins at the great hotels, the hospitality of the Casa Challoner was truly Highland in its lavishness, and a series of excellent dinner-parties proclaimed the new arrival and the near relationship to the city.

Nothing could exceed the cordial good understanding of Mr. Challoner and his wife at such times as these.

They walked together, drove together, never spoke without a smile, and called each other "my love" and "my dear" with the most excellent reciprocity.

The Countess of Hebrides, who had always wondered at the odd marriage "Archie's daughter" had made, was obliged to concede that the *mésalliance* had turned out better than might have been feared, and that the husband seemed a good creature; and so let the good creature make purchases for her in Etruscan jewellery, and Castellani necklaces, and Roman antiquities, and modern Fortunys and Tito Contis.

The mighty Hebrides never stayed very long at a time; but these great people are like the sun, and leave a trail of glory behind them long after they have passed out of sight.

The afterglow of them rested on the Casa Challoner and gilded it like the Ark of the Covenant in the sight of all the artists and journalists, and *bric-à-brac* collectors, and transatlantic wayfarers who made the sum of their daily society, and who drifted perpetually in and out of their hospitable chambers, and who in return defended everywhere the Challoner reputation with as much ardour and perhaps as little direction as they defended a doubtful Guercino that they wanted to sell, or an antique Pausanias, of which everything was modern except the right ear.

The Society of the Winter Cities is motley. There are two parts to it; the small fish that always live in the foreign water, and the bigger fish that only float through it. The fish that live in the water, who for the most part have mould on their backs of some "story" or another, and cannot well live in their own native streams, vie with each other for the big fish that only come to tarry for a season, with all the glory of diamond-bright scales upon

them, and all their signet-marks as monarchs of the deep. When a big fish arrives, the little fish all rush to catch the shadow of his glory; and there are no bigger fish anywhere than these salmon from north of Tweed with which the Lady Joan claimed kinship.

And it was her mighty skill in catching these big fish that kept herself in smooth waters.

Mrs. Macscrip, the banker's wife, whose father had driven a wheelbarrow and wielded an auctioneer's hammer in New York, would not quarrel with a woman who could ask her to luncheon with that very great lady the Countess of Hebrides. Mrs. Middleway, the evangelical pastor's better half, could only eagerly return calls that brought her into the same chambers with that really noble and Christian gentleman, Lord Fingal; and all the rest of the little people who were the mouthpieces of that irresistible potentate Mrs. Grundy would not be either cold or censorious on anyone who could call half the Peerage "my cousins."

Lady Joan pleased Mrs. Grundy, and most other women, for many reasons.

First of all, she was indisputably a lady in her own right and a Perth-Douglas; and besides, there was that floating impression that she had something to hide, and something to fear, which enabled them to feel above her level. Water may like to find its own level, but women do not. Again, she took extreme trouble to conciliate her own sex. She was morbidly anxious about their estimate of her; her braggadoccio often veiled a quaking pulse. For women she hung her Christmas-tree with pretty trifles; for women she bought tickets at charity balls, and gave them lavishly away to large families of marriageable daughters; for women she gave her carefully calculated dinners when a duke's eldest son or a rich

unmarried commoner was passing through Rome; for women, indeed, she would even go so far as to find amongst all her *roba* a few lengths of real old Venetian lace, or a genuine rococo locket, and let some happy fair one go off with it really at a bargain. And all this study and self-sacrifice brought her in a rich harvest.

For any harvest is rich to us that is the one of our desire; and the light of Lady Joan's eyes was her own face reflected in a Louis Quinze mirror at some great banker's ball, and her own name inscribed on the books of some hotel where some royal princess was staying; her own Delft card-plate filled with polished pasteboard, and her own little drawing-room packed with persons who were Personages.

Throughout Society there is everywhere to be met with a large class of well-born people who want perpetual amusement and cannot pay for it. They are the offshoots of the nobilities of nations, the flowers that are next the rose; the fringes of the purples; the crumb of the cake. They are nicely mannered, frothily educated, have tastes wider than their purses, are utterly useless, and like to be amused from one year's end to the other without its costing them greatly. They like to use other people's carriages, to have other people's opera-boxes, to dine out constantly, to get innumerable pleasantnesses without having their pride hurt by any approach to patronage; because they are gentlefolks—always gentlefolks—only they like life to be a merry-go-round on other people's horses.

It is a large class, and a gay one, and an amiable one, and a very grateful one—so long as you are able to entertain it. When the day comes that you cannot do so it will forget you—that is all.

It will not be bitter about you: it has not mind

enough for that; it will only forget you. It is always enjoying itself.

It is a class which abounds in all cities of pleasure; and its suffrages are to be bought. What pleases it it will praise; and these praises are like little puffs of south wind: they will send up a monster balloon like a soap-bubble, if only there be but enough of them.

The Lady Joan, who had been born amongst the purples, but had been forced to live amongst its fringes, courted this numerous class, and succeeded with it.

"I took Io to my dear Hebrides; they're so fond of him!" she would be able to say for a twelvemonth; so she thought to herself now, receiving the Hebrides invitation; and in her mind's eye she could see all the bankers', and consuls', and merchants' wives, all the little gentilities, and all the free-born Americans, running about, and saying with virtuous lips, "She took him to the Hebrides"! How *can* there be anything in it?"

And if ever Lady Joan blessed Providence she blessed it for Scotch cousinship.

At this moment, however, she put aside both the great Hebrides, and the Salutation to the Virgin, and arrayed herself in the character she always wore for Voightel's friend.

She wore many characters, according to her spectators. For the great Scotch cousins she was a very happy and virtuous wife; ill-placed, indeed, in a social position unworthy of her, but with qualities that would have graced a duchess's coronet. To the world in general she was a much-enduring and much-forgiving martyr—a sacrifice by her family to the golden calf, and heroically pressing the knife of sacrifice meekly to her bosom. To a chosen few she was an adventurous, devil-may-care, high-spirited creature, who threw her cap over the mill

and didn't care who saw it in the air. To herself she was a combination of fine mind and fearless nature, a sort of Madame Tallien dashed with the virile vigour of a Lady of Lathom.

But even the chosen few never saw her as she actually was, and it may certainly be averred that she herself never did. She thought she had a will of iron, a brain of steel, a dauntless courage, and a matchless wit. She never dreamed that she was after all only a terrible coward at heart, disguised in a fine swagger like Pistol's, having neither the force in her to defy society nor the force in her to deny her passions.

At this moment she arrayed herself in the part that she always thought most appropriate for receiving a person who knew Voightel and lived in Paris, and did her best to seem to Etoile a clever, brilliant woman of the world, with honest outspokenness of tongue and fearless utterances of advanced thought, yet one that never affected to be altogether above the mundane amusements of a pleasant society that adored her as one of its leaders.

"So delighted to see you; so kind of you to come!" she cried, with that cordiality of welcome which looked so real when she did not upset it with a bit of rudeness or bad temper. "You are always with Princess Vera, aren't you? How can you condescend to such small folks as we are? But I'm charmed that you *do*. Will a feminine Velasquez like yourself deign to help me in a most important question? Look here at all these old plates. Io's brought them for me to pick out a costume for the Clams' fancy ball. What do you say to this—or this? They're all very stiff, but that style rather suits me, I think, and I've lots of brocade doing nothing. Don't you think this one, if it were made of ruby velvet,

and the stomacher sewn with seed-pearls? I bought a lot the other day. And the ruff will be becoming. And I've heaps of old Venetian prints. Io says these plates aren't correct. He's some old family portrait he wants me to dress like. You know he's such a fidget about historical accuracy. He made himself wretched the other night because my Louis Treize costume had eighteenth century buttons on it and lace only fifty years old. He said I was a dancing anachronism. Good gracious! here he is—come to luncheon, actually—a thing he never does. That's because *you're* here! My dear Io, can't you throw your coat down without breaking those tulips all to pieces?"

The fallen petals of the tulips made her eyes darken angrily. Why did he come to luncheon when he was not ordered? Of course when ordered he had to come, no matter how inconvenient to himself; but any sign of an independent will in him was a glimpse of that cloven hoof of rebellion which she had believed that she had crushed under for ever.

When he rebelled she always made him ridiculous. Before he could speak she tossed him the costume drawings.

"Here, Comtesse Etoile has chosen this dress for me," she called to him. "Take a pencil and write out what the stuff and all ought to be on the margin, and then Mariannina can follow your notes. Have you been to the Palmiro sale? I hope to goodness you didn't let that Capo di Monte slip through your fingers. Has Davis's agent got it? Oh, good heavens, Io, what a fool you are! I knew how it would be if I didn't go myself! Mr. Challoner 'll be furious. There'll be no peace for a week. It's always so when you do anything alone."

"*Ma chère*, the person from London——" began

loris. But she never indulged him by hearing his explanations.

"Nonsense. Of course Davis's agent got it if you weren't quick enough. Don't talk rubbish. You know well enough I'd told you to get it at any price—any price. It will fetch hundreds in Pall Mall. All the rest of the Palmiro things were trash, but that was worth any money. But it's always so when you go alone. Have you had those grapes and woodcocks sent up to the Hebrides? Did you send to Fiordelisa for the camellias for to-night? And have you told 'em to blister Pippo? Oh, you'll be going to the stable to sit with him. What do you think he did do?" she pursued, turning to Etoile. "When his old mare was blistered last summer he stayed with her all day long, because he thought she felt the pain less if he stroked her! I believe he'll want to give the hares and foxes anæsthetics before we shoot 'em next! There he was all day long in the mare's stall, reading Giusti and stroking her neck. He wore mourning when the old beast died."

"*Oh!—carissima mia!—*"

"Oh, you know you did, or you wanted to, if I hadn't laughed at you. Now, write those notes clear, so that Mariannina can read 'em. Ruby velvet, and just a touch here and there of gold. I want to use up that *lame d'oro* we got in the Ghetto. The stomacher isn't cut right? Well, draw it the shape it should be. Shall it be sewn with seed-pearls or Turkish sequins? Oh, pearls, I think. We bought all those ropes of 'em the other day, and I may as well wear 'em before——"

"Before we sell them again," she was going to say, but instead, as Etoile was there, substituted a less telltale phrase.

"Before I get sick of the sight of them, lying about

in that dish. One does get sick of pearls so soon. Now, diamonds never pall on you. They seem always changing. When a fairy sends me anything for my birthday I wish she'd always send me diamonds."

Ioris sighed. He knew what that meant. And diamonds cost money, and he was not rich. He sketched the Venetian costume obediently in silence. Lady Joan walked over to him and rested one hand on his shoulder, and with the other stroked back the dark hair of his head as it was bent over the drawing.

All the while she looked at Etoile furtively, as though by the action she would say, "Take care what you do. This is mine."

Ioris moved under her touch a little petulantly. He went on drawing without response.

Etoile looked at him through dreaming eyes; that delicate aquiline profile against the high crimson lights of the wall-hangings had a fascination for her as for all artists. For the moment she felt a sense of disgust to see those strong, firm, sinewy hands clasped on his shoulder like a hand that holds, and holds, for ever. She rose and turned from the sight, and went to a little Albano hanging near.

Ioris threw his pencil away broken.

"It is of no use drawing on that wretched paper," he said, displacing the hand that was on his shoulder by a quick and, as it seemed, accidental manœuvre. "I will send you the costume later. It will be much easier to copy at once that Venetian portrait I told you of; you shall have it by to-morrow morning."

"Luncheon is ready," said the Lady Joan curtly, and she went in without ceremony to her dining-room, where she scolded her little girl for having put on silk when she ought to have put on merino, and did a battle-royal

with her husband about the disputed frock. Of course she did not care a rush about the frock, but the fierce disputation did her good. The child was brought up on very simple principles. What her father ordered her mother forbade, and what her mother commanded her father refused. The child had quickly learned how to get all she wanted by the mere process of pitting them one against each other.

"Mamma will let me have it, because papa can't bear me to," she would say to her little companions, with questionable grammar but the unquestionable principles proper to a young daughter of a house whose foundation-stone was the Triangle of Dumas.

All through luncheon Lady Joan descanted on the extravagance of the offending frock and the injury done to her by the loss of the Capo di Monte to Davis.

She was a woman whose passions, like the fires in Vesuvius, threw up much smoke and many stones.

Ioris talked of literature and art, ate only a few of his own grapes, and for once disregarded his hostess.

Mr. Challoner, who always listened and watched impassive as Fate and as immutable, commenting on all things, and interfering in none, like the Chorus to a Greek play—Mr. Challoner thought to himself that his own vengeance was dawning.

But after all Mr. Challoner was a man of the world. Things were better for him as they were. Peace is a calmer thing than revenge—especially when peace means that some one else is worried instead of yourself, and revenge means that you will be left all alone to bear the beating of the storm.

Mr. Challoner, as a student of human nature and a mere mortal man, could not but enjoy the prevision that Ioris was drifting unconsciously away into love elsewhere.

But Mr. Challoner, as a *mari complaisant* and a philosopher, knew that this drifting away would be a fatal blow to his own rest and tranquillity.

Solomon thought a dinner of herbs with quietness better than a stalled ox and contention; but modern men and women, who have no fancy for herbs in these days, unless mixed with sherry and soles by an excellent cook, contrive by these tacit and amicable arrangements to obtain both the ox and the quietness.

Compromise is the note of the present century and the choice of all wise men. Arbitration instead of arms; damages instead of vengeance; give-and-take instead of cut-and-thrust; universal doubt and polite suspicion instead of frank faith or stout denial. Compromise everywhere, caretaking, timorous, shrewd, dubious, apprehensive, wise; compromise is the supreme art of the nineteenth century.

Mr. Challoner and his wife studied this great theory to perfection; and it was only because they, like the greatest of mortals, were human that they sometimes forgot its rule so far as to quarrel about their shares of a picture's profits or fling their respective secrets at each other's head. This was very seldom; and besides, what did it matter? It was only when nobody else was there.

"You think me very insincere?" murmured Ioris to Etoile, a quarter of an hour later.

"Insincere? What have I said?"

"In words nothing. Your eyes say it."

"My eyes are very ill-bred then."

"Nay, tell me the truth."

"Well, I should think you were very frank by nature, but are somewhat false from habit."

"And what makes you suppose that?"

"How can I tell? Artists, you see, are like dogs:

they go by instinct, and draw deductions without being aware of it. We are unreasonable animals, not fit for drawing-rooms."

"But what should make you imagine me insincere?"

She laughed at his persistency.

"Well, do you not always call your friend '*ma chère*' when I only am with you both, and most ceremoniously '*Madame*' when other people are by?"

"Oh, that is only friendship. You must not infer more than they mean from such little slips of the tongue."

"I infer just what they do mean—no more."

Ioris smiled. A man cannot help smiling when one woman talks to him of his position with another. It is not vanity; it is recollection and anticipation combined.

"You are very mischievous, madame," he answered airily. "Perhaps one does learn to lie in the world. Society has made falsehood its axle-tree, and cannot well turn round without it. But I do not think I ever should lie to you."

"Why? What is there about me? I am not like your old stone Bocca della Verità, to bite the hand off all false speakers."

"No, you are something much better," he said abruptly. "You are one of those women who shame men into truth."

His eyes dwelt on her with earnestness, with warmth, with a passing sadness. He touched her hand with that hesitating timidity, which in him was as successful with women as audacity. His fingers closed on hers one moment with a sort of supplication in the gentleness of the action.

They were standing in the anteroom of the Casa Challoner. Lady Joan came through the oriental curtain dividing the rooms; and saw.

Her brows contracted, but she gave no other sign of anger.

"Are you people ready?" she cried, in her cordial and ringing voice; she had planned a drive to show her guest the Grotto of Egeria. "My dear Comtesse have you got enough on? You know it grows awfully cold at twilight. I was afraid Mr. Challoner would insist on our having his company; but the dear Dean has carried him off to the English schools. Heaven be praised for all its small mercies. You'd never forget it if you heard him prose about Numa. 'Numa never existed at all.' Well, settle it so and have done with it, I say. But not a bit of it; he'll preach on for three hours and a half to prove that Numa was moonshine. As if anybody could prove a negation! Call for Eccelino. We'll take him up at the Circle, I promised him; and the other men rode on before. Take heaps of cigars, Io. How *could* you lose that Capo di Monte to-day? It makes me so savage. You are like a baby in some things. I do believe if it wasn't for me you'd be ruined to-morrow, and have to sit on the Spanish Steps to get halfpence. Let's be off, or we shall have all the daylight gone."

And Lady Joan showed herself solicitous as she got into the carriage that her guest should be protected by scarfs and furs against the hard wind blowing from the Appenines with all the frank and pleasant cordiality that a wise woman displays when she has a grudge to pay off—by-and-by.

Lady Joan laughed and talked her brightest as they rolled along; and when she chose she could be very agreeable in a cheerful and offhand fashion, which won her much admiration amongst that large proportion of society which thinks good spirits a pretty compliment to itself. She had seen a great deal of men and manners;

she had seen most cities and some few courts; she read human nature well, though narrowly; she could tell a tale with point and humour, especially when it had in it a flavour of broad mirth. Within herself she was deeply incensed at what she had seen and heard. But then she reasoned, I could only have been making game of that stuck-up adventuress; he disliked Etoile; he had always said so. So she was very amiable to Etoile as they drove to the Grotto of Egeria, and did not chastise her lover more severely than by bestowing all her smiles on Eccelino di Sestri, a good-looking courtier, who had adored herself *dans les temps*.

"Io's my friend, of course, just as Eccelino is," she would say in her most candid manner. It was a distinguishing feature of Lady Joan's administrative capabilities that she could keep men together without their quarrelling about her. Perhaps the reason was that she let each of them think that she cheated for him all the others; or perhaps the reason was that the love she inspired was not of the strongest kind.

The carriage went out by the Albano road, under the leafless elm trees, to the silent places where Egeria's altar lies fallen under the green pall of the ivy and the wild water-fed moss.

The sun was still high, the sky cloudless, and the north wind dropped as they entered the valley of the Almo.

"No doubt that unhappy Numa, if he ever did exist, must have been awfully bullied by his wife; I should think she was a scold; and the length of her tongue made him adore the Muse of Silence as much as I do when Mr. Challoner vouchsafes one of his historical orations," said Lady Joan, with her bright laugh, as she got out of her carriage, sauntered down into the dell, lighted her

cigar, and pitched stones at the fallen statue that lies like a dead thing beneath the arching rock.

"All lovers adore that Muse. Numa was only like all of us there," said the Count di Sestri.

"Do they? I don't know anything about lovers; I only care for friends," laughed the Lady Joan, with her cigarette in her white teeth. She, for her own part, did not adore Silence at any time, and in her own heart considered that it was of no use being made love to at all unless you could publish the triumph of it right and left to your society. She liked to fasten her lover to her skirts as she pinned a signal-ribbon to her domino at the Veglione. She was not a woman to let her Romeo go from her when the lark sang; on the contrary, she liked all the cocks in the neighbourhood to crow their shrillest and call attention to him on her balcony; though, of course, she would say to the cocks like the cat in the *Animaux Parlants*, "Je suis une chatte anglaise et je n'ai point d'amants!" None of the animals believed the cat, certainly. Still in its way the cry was useful.

Ioris went forward and gathered a sprig of broom and a few sprays of maidenhair fern, and gave them to Etoile.

"Juvenal would be satisfied, I suppose. He hated the costly marbles and the artificial ornamentation; there is little enough left of them now. I am sure you, too, like it best as it is?"

"Yes, the bubbling brook sings the fittest song for Egeria; and poor Tatia too whose shade must have been so jealous of her; I am sure she never cared for all her mortal rivals in the new city on the hills there, but Egeria must have made her heart ache; Egeria, who came on the wings of the wind as she did herself, and came into her own temple to take his very soul away——"

"Have you ever loved any one, I wonder?" thought the Lady Joan, turning and looking at her with a sudden thought.

"Egeria also forgave even disloyalty," said Ioris aloud. "No infidelity changed her. She was faithful to him through death and after it."

Etoile smiled.

"Which is only to say I should think that the nymph was a woman after all."

"How little you know of women!"

"Don't turn cynic, Io," cried Lady Joan, flinging her cigar end at the mutilated statue. "It won't suit you at all. You are naturally a cross between Faust and the young man in the *Peau de Chagrin*; between Romeo and Reuben, unstable as water, &c.—you know what I mean. You are as credulous as a seal and as soft-hearted as a dog; cynicism is for men who drink brandy, beat their wives, wear long beards, and never wash their hands. Nature made *you*——"

But he lost this definition of his character, as he had wandered away after Etoile, who had gone further down to where the little stream bubbled up amongst the mosses that had once been Numa's bed.

Lady Joan glanced after them, and lit a new cigarette. She knew passion and all its ways too well not to know the meaning of that silent unconscious irresistible magnetism which draws two unfamiliar lives one to another in the indefinable physical attraction which is the birth of love. But her natural quickness of intelligence was obscured by her overweening vanity.

"He is only fooling her," she thought with indifference and amusement. "After all, if he like to do that, let him."

If another woman were made to love her lover hopelessly, that would be only so much additional entertain-

ment for herself. She was so sure of him—as sure as she was of the ring on her hand, that would stay there for ever unless she threw it aside.

“Ioris seems to admire that new comer,” said the Count Eccelino.

“Oh dear, no, he doesn’t,” said Lady Joan coolly. “He rather dislikes her; thinks her insolent and *tête montée*. But I’ve told him to be agreeable to her. She is a great favourite of Voightel’s. You know dear old Voightel, the cleverest man in all Europe. We were so fond of him long ago at Damascus.”

Of course he was only fooling Etoile, she said to herself, glancing, as she laughed with the other men about her, at the two figures that had strayed away side by side under the shadows of the trees along the stream towards the memory of Volumnia and Virgilia, and with the great cry from the breaking heart of the hero:

“I melt, and am not
Of stronger earth than others.”

Of course he was only fooling Etoile; he disliked her, so he had said a score of times; nevertheless that solitary walk displeased her.

“Who is she? I haven’t an idea,” she said roughly to another question of Eccelino di Sestri’s. “Of course she’s known all the world over for that matter, by name; but as to where she came from, I should be very sorry to have to answer for that. These kind of people always drop down from the moon, or say they do, to demonstrate that they didn’t jump up from the otter.”

“But she is a Countess d’Avesnes.”

“Yes. That’s her name, or she says it is. It sounds very aristocratic; but I don’t much believe myself in aristocracy that has no relations, and travels about with a big dog, and has the knowledge of Manon Lescaut,

with the innocent airs of Una. Men like that sort of thing; they believe in naked feet walking over hot ploughshares without a burn. We don't. We're more consistent. We don't look for daisies on dung-heaps. It's rubbish, you know. After all, think what that woman has seen! I don't say there's any real harm in her; Voightel would not have sent her to *me* if there had been, of course: but it's perfectly ridiculous to suppose that she has the white-paper-past that she pretends to have. She's very clever, that everybody knows; and a very clever woman can't be a very innocent one—when she's an artist, I mean."

The Lady Joan concluded with a puff of smoke up into the traceries of the ash-boughs overhead, for she remembered that she always pictured herself to her world as combining in her own person the two excellences which she had just declared to be incapable of co-existence.

"*Calomniez, calomniez!*" said Voltaire; "*calomniez toujours: quelque chose restera.*"

So the Lady Joan was of opinion that if you only lie everlastingly, something of it all will always be believed somewhere.

If you are only well beforehand with your falsehood all will go upon velvet; nobody ever listens to a rectification. "Is it possible?" everybody cries with eager zest; but when they have only to say "oh, wasn't it so?" nobody feels any particular interest. It is the first statement that has the swing and the success; as for explanation or retractation—pooh!—who cares to be bored?

She knew very well that what she said was not true. But Lady Joan knew also that a little fiction always came in handy.

Besides, when Ioris had wandered away without per-

mission along the bend of the water, it was only human nature to fling a stone after his companion.

Moreover, she was really incredulous that any one with such opportunities for amusement as Etoile had possessed, could have been idiot enough to have led as quiet a life as a rosebush in a nun's lattice window.

Men might believe it. But she was not to be taken in by any such nonsense.

Fame to a woman is like the *tunica incendialis* of the Latin martyrs, and it is never the fault of other women like the Lady Joan, if the torches of slander do not set it ablaze till the sulphur flames burn up the life within.

She smiled her sunniest and kindest, however, when the truants returned from the temple of Fortuna Mutabilis, as the first shadow of sunset fell over the grass.

"My dear! are you not afraid of the cold?" she said affectionately to Etoile. "We must be moving, I fear, and leave the ghost of Egeria to salute the moon all alone. You must come back to dinner with us. Oh, yes, you must! I wish you would go to the masquerade with me; but you care so little for those things. You don't get half out of life that you might, believe me. However, I suppose in return for all you lose, primroses talk to you, and stones have voices, and all that kind of thing. I've more of the Peter Bell in *me*. Give me my furs, Io; and call up the carriage. Oh, of course she'll come to dinner—I won't take any refusal. Mr. Challoner will discourse of nothing but Numa, unless we're strong enough in number to talk him down. Of all the cants, I do think that new cant of proving that nothing ever was, and that nobody ever lived, is the very worst bore that sceptical education has developed. Five o'clock! Tell them to drive fast. I shall take you home to dinner

too, Eccelino; and I'll give you the cotillon to-morrow night, if you're good, at the Macscrips."

Count Eccelino bowed his ceremonious thanks with an air of ardent gratitude. But he was too used to receive favours of this sort whenever his friend was out of favour to be much flattered by them actually. As a punishment they were also lost upon Ioris, who, as they drove homeward, was silent, letting his dark eyes brood softly upon the face of Etoile, so that whenever she looked up she met their gaze in the pensive Roman twilight.

She persisted in not dining with them that night, and went to her own room and sat and dreamed, with her head on her hands, over a fire of oak and pine.

"That man is not happy," she thought again and again; and she seemed always to feel that tender hesitating touch of his fingers, always to see those eloquent and wistful eyes in the evening shadows.

Meanwhile Lady Joan went home and dined, and then "mystified" herself in loup and domino for that first Veglione of the year.

She had a passion for masquerades. No scrutiny of marital wrath drew her to heed the secresy of that most dingy and prosaic of all Venusbergs—a *baignoir au troisième*. No weak objections on the part of her lord to any pastimes of friendship drove her, as they drive some ill-used wives, to require the shelter of one of those little close-curtained cloth-hung closets, where the poor god of love is huddled up in a black sacque, and his rosy mouth soiled with champagne-cup. She could go home with her escort at four or five in the morning, and use her latch-key, and Mr. Challoner, like a sensible sleeper, only turned cosily in his bed at the back of the house, and, if he woke at all at the sound of his hall-door's unclosing,

only thought what a fool the other man was to have danced attendance through all those hours in the noise and the heat of that dingy festival.

Lady Joan had no need of masquerades. With her latch-key in her pocket, and her friend's cab at her command, she could come and go, alone or accompanied, in that happy freedom which is the privilege of a perfect conjugal comprehension. The cabman knew much more about her than Mr. Challoner.

But though she had no need of them her soul adored the Veglione. That dance Macabre was the delight of her heart, as the Brumalia of the Roman matron's.

To mystify herself, or think she did so; to laugh louder than with due regard to society she ever could elsewhere; to throw a stone and grin undiscovered and pass on; to fasten strangers with her shining eyes, and jeer at them and leave them; to torment her friends and torture her foes, and sup and smoke and go home in the day-break, when the masks were all reeling up the streets and the carnival songs were greeting the sunrise—that was pleasure to the Lady Joan.

It requited her for a hundred dismal clerical luncheons off cold lamb and lettuce, with chaplains and consuls; it fortified her against a thousand big dinners with her tongue tied, and her "dear Robert" at the bottom of the table.

Ioris sighed this evening as he fastened her mask behind her ears and went down with her into the dingy whirlpool. He was so tired of it all.

The thin disguises, the stupid jokes, the commonplace intrigues, the coarse pretence of deceiving and of being deceived, the noise, the uproar, the shrill cries, the headlong dances—they had grown so tiresome. He had laughed his lightest and waltzed his wildest in other

years; but he was tired of it all—very tired—now as he walked about amongst the screaming crowd, and exchanged the vapid phrases of custom, with dominoes that were as well known to him as though he had met them in broad day; and heard the resonant voice of his empress ring loud above the music in merciless speech and worn-out jibes; and lighted her cigarettes, and carried her fan, and got her her claret-cup, and thought how long the night was—the boisterous, empty, joyless, senseless night, through which, all the while, he had to laugh and be ready with answer, and look amused, and turn an airy compliment, and join in all the mirth, and never show a yawn, but wait on duty till the kindly sun should rise, and so release him.

What weariness will men endure if only it be not in the name of virtue!

“A fine long night, Excellence!” said the cabman, with a radiant smile, as Ioris paid him while the bells of the first mass rung in the dawn.

“A terrible long night,” thought his employer, looking up at the blue morning skies.

The cabman, who, had he ever been cross-questioned by Society, could have rendered the clerical cold lamb for ever a Passover of the past to the Casa Challoner, drove away joyous to get his breakfast and gamble in the sun. Ioris went upstairs and shut the sun out, and threw himself on his bed.

“Good God! once I thought this pleasure!” he murmured as his heavy eyelids fell.

So he had thought this love.

CHAPTER XV.

"CHÈRE COMTESSE ETOILE, pardon me, but you sow the earth with dragon's teeth!" said Lady Cardiff one morning, about four o'clock, on the Pincio. "You cannot want enemies; you really cannot *want* them—you must have so many! I don't wish to be rude, you know, but you must. Whoever shines, &c. Why will you make so many unnecessary ones? Do tell me."

"What have I done?" said Etoile with amazement and a little absently. She was thinking of things that Ioris had said the night before in the Palazzo Farnese, where there had been an early reception.

"Done?" echoed Lady Cardiff. "Why, you have cut our beloved Mrs. Henry V. Clams *dead*! Unconsciously, I daresay, but still dead. You looked at her as you did it; you did really. I must say so if they ask me."

"I did not see her," said Etoile. "Not that I should be unwilling to commit the crime consciously, if you mean that."

"Good gracious! Has she offended you?"

"Not in the least; but why should I know her? She is far less educated than my maid, and very many times more vulgar."

"Of course; but still why?"

"With a vulgarity more blatant for the fine clothes it is dressed in; a vulgarity that is not even redeemed by mere decency."

Lady Cardiff shifted her sunshade.

"Terribly strongly you put things; of course they sound horrible when you put them like that. But everybody knows her. It's a way we've got into nowadays.

Why don't you write a comedy like *l'Etrangère* or the *Famille Benoiton*, and put all that into it? We should applaud it on the stage; but it only sounds uncomfortable off;—you don't mind my saying what I think?"

"Pray always say what you think. Would you continue to know Mrs. Henry V. Clams if her husband were ruined to-morrow?"

"Goodness me! of course not; and she would never expect it—never. She does know her place. There is nothing like a free and independent citizen for taking slights good-temperedly. I never knew *how* much kicking a human being would stand until I knew these born-democrats. One didn't know them twenty years ago. I don't know why we didn't. They hadn't struck oil, I suppose, and made it worth our while; or Worth hadn't dressed them, and they were still mere natural tar and feathers. Somehow we didn't know them. Perhaps they hadn't come over to 'Eurôpe.' Know her if she were ruined? The idea! You might as well ask would Fontebranda continue to *filer le parfait amour*."

"Poor woman!" said Etoile.

"You needn't pity her, my dear. You may be quite sure she knows quite well the terms on which she has my visits and his devotion. If all the 'red cents' went to-morrow I daresay she'd go back across the water and 'keep a bar' very happily. The days of strong objections and strong emotions are alike over, believe me. As for you, you are exactly like Molière's *Misanthrope*; I shall call you *Alceste*—

"Etre franc et sincère est mon plus grand talent,
Je ne sais point jouer les hommes en parlant,
Et qui n'a pas le don de cacher ce qu'il pense,
Doit faire en ce pays fort peu de résidence.

Dear me! why will people go on writing? As if Molière and Fielding between them hadn't said all that there is

to be said better than anyone else ever can say it! By the bye, why wouldn't you go to the Echéance ball?"

"I dislike balls."

"Very well; if you dislike dancing, don't dance; though if a woman don't, you know, they always think she has got a short leg, or a cork leg, or something or other that's dreadful. But why not show yourself at them? At least show yourself. One goes to balls as one goes to church. It's a social muster, and not to be there looks odd. I wish you had gone. Our dear Joan was in great force there; her Io behind her chair at supper, and she sending him about here, there, and everywhere to do this, that, and the other. 'Io, hand that mayonnaise.' 'Io, take Lady Cardiff that chicken.' 'Io, reach me those strawberries.' You should have heard her! I grinned and everybody grinned;—except that admirable wooden husband. She'd got a fine set of sapphires on, and told five different histories in my hearing of how she did get 'em. Do you happen to know where she did? 'Io' does, I suppose. She wanted us all to take shares in some Society for the Diffusion of Rabbits over the Campagna. It seems there are no rabbits in Italy. I never noticed it, did you? And we're all to repair this omission of Nature and make a fortune out of their tails (I think it's their tails); and there is no risk whatever, she says; it's to be all pure profit. Clever creature! She really is great fun. Half her life is spent in being so dreadfully afraid people should think she has a lover, and the other half is spent in being so dreadfully afraid people should think she *hasn't*! I left her at the ball, and I didn't come away till five. Poor 'Io' looked very much bored, I thought. What a very queer thing love is!"

Etoile was silent. She was thinking of him, as he

had been at the Palazzo Farnese earlier in the same evening. She felt angered—unreasonably angered that he had gone later to this ball.

“Not that it’s hardly ever more than the mere question of a *quid pro quo*,” continued Lady Cardiff, looking up into the pink dome of her point-lace parasol; “a give-and-take partnership of vanity and convenience. Throw in with the selfishness of this vanity, the mere animal selfishness of the senses, and weld them with the adhering force of habit, and you have the only form of love that is known to nine-tenths of our men and women. Passion is a dead letter to them. It would scare them out of their lives. They know no more of it than they do of God, and think no more of it than they do of their graves. Modern love is like modern furniture, very showy and sold at a long price, but all veneer. Pray, how is your friend with the *grande passion* that sends its object to the frosty Caucasus? I saw in yesterday’s *Galignani* that Fedor Souroff had been badly wounded in some mountain skirmish. Is that true? Yes? Dear me! Now, if he had only taken a fancy to Mrs. Henry V. Clams or our dear Joan, nothing of that would have happened to him. It’s a caution, as Mrs. Henry would say. Ah, there’s General Desart and Mrs. Desart, *and* Buonretiro. Pretty woman still, ain’t she? Been flirting fifteen years straight through, and as ‘fit’ now as ever she was. They are two of the pillars of the Casa Challoner. General Desart believes in Mr. Challoner as one man of honour believes in another. There’s nothing so charming as the amiability of any unamiable people when they occupy the same position, and that a ticklish one. ‘Ca’ me and I’ll ca’ thee,’ is ever present in their minds. General Desart declares he is ready to put his hand in the fire if Ioris is anything he oughtn’t to be, &c., &c.; and Mr. Challoner is ready

to put *his* hand in the fire if Buonretiro is anything *he* oughtn't to be, &c., &c. Beautiful reciprocity of faith! Ah, my dear General, how do? Lovely weather, isn't it? Charlie gone back to Eton? Handsome boy. How do, dear? How well you look! You miss Charlie? To be sure, to be sure. One always misses schoolboys, if only by the preternatural stillness of the house when they're gone. Shall I see you at the Japanese Embassy to-night?"

With a few pleasant words Lady Cardiff bade the Desarts adieu, and sailed on under the palm that once saw Augustan Rome.

By the toy-kiosque, they met again Mrs. Henry V. Clams and the Marquis Fontebranda; reaching the summer-house, they encountered the great Duchess of Bridgewater, with her shadow, Lord Dauntless, who were on the eve of hastening home, one to the Court, and the other to the Commons; by the water-clock they saw that leader of fashion the Baroness de Bruges, with young Ferrara, who had a face like the Dolce Christ, and was twenty years her junior; feeding the swans was lively Lady Eye-bright, who cheated at cards and had her ears boxed, but was highly esteemed nevertheless, because she was believed to have compromised herself with a very high personage, and to have heaps of his letters, very ill spelt. Nearer the wall, looking at the sunset and her neighbours' gowns alternately, was Princess Gregarine, whom men called "Les vices sympathiques"; ugly as a Kaffir, charming as a syren, who called herself the best dressed gorilla in Europe, and whose caprices ranged from Grand Dukes to Corporals of the Guard, and, except for superiority of plunder, preferred the latter.

"Delightful age we live in," said Lady Cardiff, when she had nodded to them all, and stopped for her last chat, and was going towards her carriage. "Such dear,

virtuous women all these are, and so funny it is to see them where Messalina used to make a beast of herself with Silius! Poor Messalina. She was but a primitive creature, and knew no better than to exhibit herself in the streets; and Claudius was an easy husband, and uxorious. Yet he did cut up rough at last, Mr. Challoner and General Desart, Bridgewater and Gregarine, never will. It has been reserved for the Christian world, which boasts of its one wife to one man, to produce a polygamy and polyandry side by side in its midst like the lion and the lamb in Revelations. We've drawing-room editions of everything—we should have had one of the Bible and Shakespeare, only that nobody ever reads them,—and so we have drawing-room editions of illicit love, a pretty thing that we can ask to dinner, nod to in church, and meet at court balls. Dear me! poor Messalina was a *very* primitive creature, and must have had a sort of conscience in her after all. We've none."

As the carriage passed outward, and went under the clipped ilex trees of the Villa Medius in the rosy light of the passing day, under the trees they saw the Lady Joan and Ioris.

Lady Joan kissed her hand with a bright and cordial smile.

Ioris, as he bowed, coloured and then grew very pale.

Lady Cardiff smiled as she said: "Are they going up? They'll join the Desarts, I daresay; quite seasonable. The Duchess and the Gregarine are a flight above her; even little Eyebright, I think, don't favour her much. Little Eyebright's no fool, though she does lose her pin-money for a year in five seconds at Draw-Poker. What a charming game, and what a charming name—Draw-Poker! It is such an epitome of our times, isn't it? All the cards 'chucked,' and the game to the one that 'grabs' quickest.

When the world had good manners it played *Ecarté* and *Piquet*; now it has no manners at all, it plays *Poker*. It's curious that we should have no manners, but it is true. Heavens! to think of the old *grandes dames* I remember in my babyhood—friends of the *Lamballe* and the *Polignac*, sitters to *Lawrence* and poems for *Praed*! Where has it all gone—the serene grace, the grand courtesy, the perfect delicacy of sentiment and of phrase, the true consciousness of *noblesse oblige*? It has gone like the old sweet fragrant scent of the dried rose-leaves in the rooms. Nobody has dried rose-leaves now. They have *brûle-parfums* instead, and the perfumes are as loud as their dress and their speech.”

Lady Cardiff sighed as she drew up the carriage-skin closer.

“I took a pretty woman yesterday (a great lady, too, as place goes) to see *Vassiltchikoff*'s new house. The house is lovely, and has worlds of pretty things; he's a great collector. ‘*Comme vous êtes bien installé ici,*’ she said to him. ‘*Il faut que j’y pince quelque chose,*’ and she carried off one of his best bits of saxe, and an enamelled sweetmeat box of *Petitôt*'s. And she'd only seen him twice before.

“*Pince!*” The language of the gutter, and with the language the manners, and with the manners the morals: of course!—inevitable and perpetual conjunction.

“But, my dear, the supreme feminine passion of the day is the bourgeois passion of thrift! In face of all our lawless expenditure and idiotic profusion! Yes. In face of all that. Perhaps because of all that. Women seldom spend their *own* money. Ask *Dauntless*, *Ioris*, *Buonretiro*, or *Hèlené Gregarine*'s Grand Dukes. It is expensive work to be *Madame*'s ‘friend’ now-a-days. Thrift is the fashionable woman's master-motive—it's

only a means to an end; she gets that she may squander. She is the miser and the heir in one person. She seldom wears a dress three times, it's true, and never heeds the loss of one; but that is a matter of vanity and rivalry. To make up for it, she insures her chemises, underpays her governesses, sells her wardrobe when she has to go into mourning, borrows from her friends, and plunders from her lovers. In all her romances she keeps a weather eye open to what will pay; and when she is insisting on a separation, never adores Don Juan so much but what she keeps hold of her money if she can. That most poetic and transparent soul, Princess Milianoff, wore mourning here all carnival, because her lover was sent out of the country; ruined her family by her headstrong passion; told Milianoff flat to his face that she loathed him and everything belonging to him, and adored Stornellino, and meant to live with him at all costs; but all the same she stipulated that she should have all the Milianoff's jewels, and even asked for the twelve footmen's liveries, and all their silk stockings. Impossible, you say? No; a fact, my dear. A plain, hard, absolute fact. The lawyers heard her. People who say 'Impossible' don't know our world; that's all. She was mad about Stornellino, but all the same she thought she might as well plunder while she could from her husband. The women of our day don't perceive when they drop to bathos. They make absurd anti-climaxes, and never see the ridicule of them. Madame Milianoff was superb in her wrath and her beauty, deaf to her sister's prayers, blind to her father's tears, adamant to her husband's upbraiding, declaring by all the powers that were that she loathed even her child because her child was also his. It was a scene of Medea, of Phædre, of Lucrezia—but all the same she fought for every one of her diamonds, and

remembered the footmen's silk stockings. Now, if there were a living Beaumarchais to put that on the stage, who'd believe it? And yet it is a fact, I tell you. A fact as hard as a pebble. All thrift, my dear; all thrift. That is why there is no passion in our day. They have sensual fancies like rockets, that make a great rush and blaze for a second, but they are always fastened to a gold stick of solid bullion, and when the rocket evaporates in the air the stick comes down to the ground,—and they keep it. When the woman of our day publishes her '*Souvenirs de mes Tendresses*,' she need only edit her banker's book—with a key and an explanatory note or two. '*A la place du cœur elle n'a qu'une lettre de change.*' If the quotation is not textually correct it ought to be; it would have been if Hugo had known as much of our world as he does of little Jeanne. By-the-way, Joan Chalonier will get that royal subsidy, they say, out of the ministers for her Messina Bridge, to prop it up a little while. I dare say that's why she looks so smiling to-day.

"Ah! all her efforts seem very puny and petty to you, no doubt; but, in point of fact, those efforts mean very much. They mean perpetual humiliation, constant self-restraint, continual strain, incessant vigilance. Only fancy what it must be to that fiery-hearted violent creature to choke down her temper, to control her scorn, to hide her passion, to veil her disdain; perpetually to stoop and eat dust in the sight of everybody, and bring her tameless tongue to utter all the humble pie of commonplace and compliment! What a purgatory it must be, you say? N—no; hardly that. A continual effort certainly, but she is sustained in it by her anxiety to succeed; and, after all, very likely she feels the fun of the whole thing, and grins all day behind her mask.

"It is nothing new, all this; though you fume about

it now, as Alceste fumed and fretted in his time. Society always had its fixed demands. It used to exact birth. It used to exact manners. In a remote and golden age there is a tradition that it was once contented with mind. Now-a-days it exacts money, or rather amusement, because if you don't let other folks have the benefit of your money, society will take no account of it. But have money and spend it well (that is, let society live on it, gorge with it, walk ankle deep in it), and you may be anything and do anything; you may have been an omnibus conductor in the Strand, and you may marry a duke's daughter. You may have been an oyster girl in New York, and you may entertain royalties. It is impossible to exaggerate an age of anomaly and hyperbole. There never was an age when people were so voracious of amusement, and so tired of it, both in one. It is a perpetual carnival and a permanent yawn. If you can do anything to amuse us you are safe—till we get used to you—and then you amuse us no longer, and must go to the wall. Every age has its price: what Walpole said of men must be true of mankind. Anybody can buy the present age that will bid very high and pay with tact as well as bullion. There is nothing it will not pardon if it see its way to getting a new sensation out of its leniency. Perhaps no one ought to complain. A society with an india-rubber conscience, no memory, and an absolute indifference to eating its own words and making itself ridiculous, is, after all, a convenient one to live in—if you can pay for its suffrages. Panshanger Pomfret married out of his own rank the other day. We were horrified. We were outraged. We had no words to express our sense of the infamy that gave a great man and seventy-five thousand a year to a woman whom nobody knew. We found out all about her in a month, that she had been on the

boards of fifth-rate theatres, that she had sung in music halls and danced in tights, that she had been to chimney-sweeps' balls, that she had cooked sausages and sold gin-sling, that she had hired a fictitious mother out from an unmentionable place in New York; in short, that there was nothing that she hadn't done, and we ran a neck-and-neck race as to who should know the last newest and vilest story about her. Well, Pan Pomfret took the bull by the horns, and gilded the horns. (They seldom prick *then*, my dear.) London, and Paris, and Italy were dazzled by his wealth and summoned to his entertainments. He got his cousin to present her at Court, and his sister to receive her; and down the throat of the rest of the world forced her like a very big golden pill. *Il connaît son monde*, my dear. *Luxe* in London, *luxe* in Paris; *luxe* in Rome; and society bidden to enjoy it; and above all, *luxe* with tact like minever on white satin. Nothing resists the two—nothing. They make a sovereign's robes, in which a beggar will look regal. It is only a year since he married her, but there is nothing on earth more successful than Panshanger Pomfret's wife. Sung in music halls! Danced in tights! Heavens! my dear, we would all swear till we were black in the face that the public never saw so much even as the very tip of her nose. She did sing in private concerts, in Park Lane and Portman Square, and, we think, *once* at Buckingham Palace. But anything else, my dear! anything else! why we never heard of such slander—never! We see, hear, and feel her only through a golden shower, as Danae saw, heard, and felt Jupiter; and what a difference it makes in our sentiments! Mr. Challoner's wife can't be Panshanger Pomfret's, but in her little way she goes on the same principle. The Pomfrets go in for treble events at four figures, and the Challoners for selling-races and

shilling sweepstakes, but the principle is the same; the only principle, indeed, that will ever succeed now-a-days."

"Believe me, Society is a plant that must be fed and watered, and dug and matted scrupulously," continued Lady Cardiff gravely, as they rolled homeward through the sunset lightened streets. "If you do not take endless trouble with it, it will never blossom for you. Are there not dukes and duchesses nearly as obscure as Jones and Brown? Are there not millionaires, aye billionaires for that matter, who live hidden under their gold as utterly as if it were a dust heap? Why do you see a marchioness a nonentity whose name is barely known off her estates, and a new comer, who has nothing but her shrewd sense and her pleasant manner, pushed up into a leader of fashion? It's all a matter of trouble and tact, my dear; nothing more. It isn't what you have, but how you spend it. It isn't what you are, but what you appear to be. It isn't rank, or brains, or riches, or conduct; you have any one of them, or you may have them all, and yet may avail you nothing. You may remain obscure. Look at Lady Kencarrow in London now—not pretty, not clever, not witty, a third-rate actress in the country, as anybody knows, and yet what a success! Princes of the blood go to dine with her, her house is the very temple of distinction. All a matter of tact, my dear, and of attention. She has devoted her life to getting a Position. She has succeeded. Nothing succeeds like success. You people who are very clever, or very proud, or very careless never—pardon me—succeed with Society. You make a stir in it, perhaps, but that never lasts long; you won't take the pains to please it; and it soon leaves you for people who do. A witty thing comes into your head and you say it, careless whom it may hit. You are bored by the

vanity of other folks, and you show it, indifferent where you may offend. You won't conciliate big little people, and they in their spite set the big big people against you. So the snowball grows, and one day it gets large enough and hard enough to knock you out of Society altogether. People must make themselves agreeable to be agreeable to the world; yes, and eat a good deal of dust, too; that I concede. If they are very high and mighty by birth and all the rest of it, of course they can be as disagreeable as they choose, and make others eat the dust always. But if not, there is nothing for it but to toady. Believe me, nothing but to toady. Dear Lady Joan knows it. In her little way she succeeds thoroughly. It's a very little way, I grant: to be visited like other people, and go to bankers' balls and clergymen's tea fights, and stand well in ordinary society generally. That's her ambition! But see how she attains to what she wants—just by smiling on women she hates, and making believe that a twopenny-halfpenny chaplain can send her to heaven on earth! Oh, it all seems unutterably small to you. I know that," she said, with some impatience, as Etoile irreverently laughed. "You clever poetic people have a sort of world of your own, a rock amongst the waves, like Chateaubriand's Tomb. But, after all, my dear creature, Society is not to be despised. It is *pleasant*. Pleasantness is the soft note of this generation, just as scientific assassination is the harsh note of it. The age is compounded of the two. Half of it is chloroform; the other half is dynamite. We are not brilliant, nor powerful, nor original; we shall never sparkle like the *beau siècle*, nor leave heirs to immortality like the Cinque Cento, nor shape the world anew like the early Christians, nor radiate with crystal clearness like the days of Pericles. But when we are not murderous,

we are pleasant, pre-eminently pleasant; we know how to gild things, we know how to gloss them, we know how to set chairs on wheels, and put spring cushions in them: we are the Age of Anæsthetics. We have invented painless dentistry and patent bedsteads, we have discovered chloral and condonation, and though we have, to be sure, to bear uncomfortable things like the telephone, the Commune, and Wagner, still we snooze ourselves asleep, and decide that since we must all die so soon we will be as comfortable as we can whilst we are living. It is the doctrine of Horace, with the poetry left out. We are like Tennyson's 'Lotus-eaters:'—'Let us alone, what is there worth a row?' (Isn't that the line?) Now, you see, you people who will live on that rock in the midst of the sea, and fly across to us like eagles, only disturb us. That is the truth. You make us think, and Society dislikes thinking. You call things by their right names, and Society hates that, though Queen Bess didn't mind it. You trumpet our own littleness in our ear, and we know it so well that we do not care to hear much about it. You shudder at sin, and we have all agreed that there is no such thing as sin, only mere differences of opinion, which, provided they don't offend us, we have no business with: adultery is a *liaison*, lying is gossip, debt is a momentary embarrassment, immorality is a little slip, and so forth; and when we have arranged this pretty little dictionary of convenient pseudonyms, it is not agreeable to have it sent flying by fierce, dreadful, old words, that are only fit for some book that nobody ever reads, like Milton or the Family Bible. We do not want to think. We do not want to hear. We do not care about anything. Only give us a good dinner and plenty of money, and let us outshine our neighbours. There is the Nineteenth Century Gospel. My dear, if

Ecclesiasticus himself came over from that rock of yours, he would preach in vain. You cannot convince people that don't want to be convinced. We call ourselves Christians—Heaven save the mark!—but we are only the very lowest kind of pagans. We do not believe in anything—except that nothing matters. Well, perhaps nothing does matter. Only one wonders why ever so many of us were all created, only just to find *that* out."

And Lady Cardiff, who sat and watched the world and her generation with the same contemptuous yet good-humoured amusement that she watched children plunder a Christmas tree, or maidens romp in a cotillon, drew a long breath as she ended her harangue, lighted a fresh cigarette as she rolled home in the dusk, and sighed for the days of Louis Quatorze.

"Why don't you talk, Io?" the Lady Joan was saying meanwhile, walking on under the trees past the kiosque.

"*Mais, ma chère!*—there is such a noise from all those carriages."

"Stuff! There's no more noise than any other day. Did you see Etoile?"

"I saw her."

"With Lady Cardiff. Horrid woman, Lady Cardiff. I can't think what you like in her, she is as insolent as ever she can be. I quite believe that story that Lord Cardiff left her because she horsewhipped him for driving another woman down to Richmond——"

"*Ça se peut,*" said Ioris with a little shrug of his shoulders.

"Unless it were *worse*," said Lady Joan. "Many people say it *was* worse. I do believe she's said something to the Monmouthshires, for they have refused my dinner. After my giving 'em all those things too; and I

wanted 'em to meet the Norwiches and the Fingals, because Fingal's out of temper about that Tabernacle of Mimo's. Somebody's been nasty and told him it is all modern bits glued together."

"But of course!" said Ioris with a certain contempt, as of one whose advice had been disregarded and was now proved right.

"Oh, of course! you're always so wise!" said his friend with much irritation. "Of course, when he'd had the money in advance and there wasn't a tabernacle to be found, nobody could do otherwise, and Fingal was delighted with the thing, delighted, until some busybody went and put him out of conceit of it; Mimo has most excellent taste, nobody better."

"Lord Fingal has better," said Ioris coldly; "the Tabernacle will blemish his chapel."

"You've never seen his chapel, and never will, unless I take you to have your soul converted to the true faith, as the Moira old fudges wanted me to do—do you remember? If you didn't like Mimo's tabernacle, why didn't you let us sell the one out of Fiordelisa? *That's* genuine!"

"*Ma chère*," said Ioris blandly, "You know well that there is nothing I ever refuse you. All I reserve to myself is the altar my fathers knelt at. It is foolish, no doubt, but is a foolishness I cannot give up;——"

"Oh, no, you can be a mule when you like," muttered Lady Joan, who had found him on matters that touched his ancestral creed immovable even under her menaces. Ioris was a man who clung to ancient faiths and ancient ways; he did not believe in them very devoutly indeed, because he was a man of the world and of his time; but he would not have them disturbed. Spoil or embellish, ruin or restore, the rest of Fiordelisa as she might, he had will enough of his own to bar her progress at the

chapel door. The Lady Joan, who looked longingly at its Della Robbias, its Cellini candlesticks, its old oak screen, its old marble altar, and its chased silver chalices, felt herself defrauded of her rights. "All these things growing mouldy for a set of peasants!" she would mutter, and in her mind's eye see them fittingly moved away to South Kensington, and did not despair even yet of one day so moving them.

At that moment Mr. Silverley Bell joined them in their walk. "My dear St. Paul!" cried Lady Joan, enchanted: his baptismal name was Paul.

Mr. Silverley Bell was flattered and smiled. He had a soft sweet smile—never softer, never sweeter, than when he was carrying little drops of poison about in little sweetmeats of pretty phrases; that was his occupation. No one could say Mr. Silverley Bell was otherwise than good-natured; he never said an ill-natured thing; he only "regretted," only "wished," only "feared." When a person's character was so bad that as a saviour of society he was obliged to drown it in the tea-pot, he always sighed as he did so, tenderly, and wore a quite crushed air, as of extreme pain.

Lady Joan was very fond of him; she had not known him very long indeed, but at a glance she had discovered the extreme usefulness of him—smile, sigh, and all. He had started with a prejudice against her, but he had been vanquished; she welcomed him so delightedly, invited him so persistently, praised him so ardently, that he could not but yield; and with this handsome woman on his arm at the spinsters' teas and the clergymen's gatherings, could not but feel meekly flattered. In return, he placed himself—smile, sigh, and all—at her disposal, and was of great value.

"Silverley Bell assures me there's nothing in it—no-

thing in it. He must know; he's always in her house," said Mrs. Grundy time and again, when having received a momentary scare from the sight of Lady Joan rattling out at the gates with a gun between her knees, and the handsome profile of Ioris dark against the sun beside her, Mr. Silverley Bell reassured her seriously, and smoothed down her ruffled scruples with a few judicious words.

"What do I care for the old cats?" she would say with a grin, twitching Pippo's reins, and flecking her whip over her tossing mane. But she did care, care endlessly, care with all her heart and soul. People who do not care do not say so. The soldier who is not afraid never boasts that he fears no ball.

The lawless gipsy half of her sent her across country with her whip and her cigar, her gun and her lover, rattling through the dust at full gallop, and showing her white teeth at broad jests that she shouted above the din of the wheels. But the coward in her was none the less powerful; and when the ponies were back in the stable, she would shake off the dust and don a full suit of decorum, and bare herself with cheerful countenance, and go through all the million and one ceremonials of commonplace existence with a zeal and a patience that demand their reward and got it.

A woman who ought to be out of society, but, nevertheless, is always in it, commands the genuine respect of both sexes. She pleases them too; for she neither offends the stronger sex by too much virtue, nor offends the weaker sex by too much effrontery. Lady Joan lunching meekly off cold lamb and lettuce with a clergyman's wife on a Sunday morning, and Lady Joan going joyously to champagne and caviare at the masquerade on a Sunday night, was an instance of that adaptability to circumstances which is the most popular of all qualities.

Mr. Silverley Bell, and such as he, enabled her to go at once to the lamb and lettuce, and to the champagne and caviare. She knew this, and petted Mr. Silverley Bell and his type accordingly.

It may be opposed to all the graceful theories on the relations of the sexes, but it is true that the woman who seeks the admiration of the majority, and shows that it is agreeable to her, will almost always secure it. She will turn against her the highest order of men indeed, but as this is a very small minority the loss will not be felt. In society, as in politics, the majority is the least intelligent but the most imposing section.

Happily for herself, she was so constituted that she could enjoy netting a minnow as much as landing a sturgeon, and brought to her efforts at capture an infinite zest that was of itself assurance of success. She took so much trouble, she was so charmed with commonplaces, her smile beamed so radiantly, her hand pressed theirs so cordially, her manner was so accentuated with the strongest welcome and the most eager enjoyment of their companionship, that a man could hardly be otherwise than gratified with his own effect on her; and when he left her presence, could not do less than defend the good manners and good taste of a lady so favourable to himself.

The art of pleasing is more based on the art of seeming pleased than people think of, and she disarmed the prejudices of her enemies by the unaffected delight she appeared to take in themselves. You may think very ill of a woman, but after all you cannot speak very ill of her if she has assured you a hundred times that you are amongst her dearest friends.

And if a very fastidious mind is displeased with flattery, very fastidious minds are not general, and a taste

for flattery is. "Be honey, and the flies will eat you," says the old saw; but, like most other proverbs, it will not admit of universal application. There is a way of being honey that is thoroughly successful and extremely popular, and constitutes a kind of armour that is bomb-proof.

"Michael Angelo was a fool," said Mr. Pratt, the English sculptor, who lived with Roman princes, and was called Pheidias Pratt by artists in general, and took the derision seriously as a compliment—to Pheidias, and would demonstrate to you that the Apollo of the Belvidere was nothing so very extraordinary after all.

"A sublime fool, but a fool!" said Pheidias Pratt, shifting his scarlet fez on one side. "Did all his work himself; only think of the waste of power! Half his years spent in chipping; lost in mere stonemason's labour. Now, I keep sixty workmen; I never touch the marble—never touch it!—and look what numbers of statues I can turn out in the year."

"And the ideas, Mr. Pratt?" said Etoile. "Do you hire them also, or do you do without them?"

"The ideas! the ideas!" echoed Pheidias with a stare; and the good fellow walked off huffed in his velvet gown, amongst his marble children, who all gazed vacuously into space with scarcely more soul in any one of them than in the carven doll of a Swabian toy-maker.

He had married, twenty years before, twenty thousand a year in the person of an alderman's heiress, and his works were to be seen in law courts and public halls, gentlemen's mansions and people's parks. What did he want with ideas? Nevertheless, he felt the allusion to such a thing was in very bad taste.

The Lady Joan, who had brought Etoile to the studio, grinned as she herself fell into ecstasies over a Desola-

tion, the embroideries of whose tunic she declared she felt she must pick off with a pair of scissors: the marble was so exactly like thread.

"How could you inquire for such 'outsiders' as ideas?" she murmured to Etoile. "Of course he hires his ideas; clever young Italians sell heaps of ideas for a hundred francs. All that's dear old Phid's own in his sculptures is his name on the pedestals."

"Poor Michael Angelo!"

The Lady Joan laughed.

"Well, I don't think you need put yourself out for him; he's pretty safe, and I don't think Phid here will go down to posterity with him. But Phid will hate you, you know, for ever. Why don't you tell him that Venus at the Bath is beautiful?"

"A bathing woman, that must have been modelled at Trouville? With a hip out of joint, too, look!"

"Phid gives capital parties, and he's 'coining' every day," said Lady Joan, dryly. "And his wife has the longest and the nastiest tongue in Europe."

And she swam after the sulking Phidias and told him that his Sabrina was the noblest work of the century; Sabrina was robed from head to foot; Mr. Pheidias Pratt thought the nude barbarous; he held, too, that it was very easy; only study anatomy, and there you were.

"A very intelligent woman, that wife of Challoner's," said the good Pheidias to his own wife, a few hours later. "If I were you I'd call on her; it isn't worth while to be too starchy; of course she larks about with Ioris and all that kind of thing; but it's no business of ours if the husband like it; and she tells me Lord Hebrides is her cousin. The Hebrides are here this winter. I'd leave a bit of pasteboard if I were you."

His wife, who hitherto had always insisted that the

Casa Challoner was too flagrant to be entered, because she herself came from Clapham and had severe notions, allowed herself to be persuaded against her conscience, and left the bit of pasteboard, and a few days later a larger piece inscribed, "Mrs. Pratt. At Home. Tuesdays"—with a very small "music" hiding itself in the corner.

Lady Joan gave a grimace of triumph before the big card. Mrs. Pratt's musical Tuesdays were amongst the choicest gatherings of the season; all the embassies went there, and hitherto Lady Joan had languished in vain for an entrance.

Of course a similar big card was delivered at the house of Ioris. Society, provided only you will wash your cup and platter, will always oblige you in these little things.

Mrs. Pratt had been six years bringing her Clapham conscience into recognition of the Casa Challoner; but having brought her conscience round, she at last brought it round with a handsome sweep, and knew the polite ways of society too much not to follow them, and sent the big card to Ioris, so that he might enter her presence with the Lady Joan, and be at hand for the Lady Joan's fan on the Lady Joan's wish to walk about the rooms, or the Lady Joan's carriage when the party was over. Mrs. Pheidias Pratt knew that as a leader of society she must be amiable in such matters.

So did Lady Joan gain her point, by merely pretending to want her scissors to pick off the embroideries of a marble Desolation, and by saying a Sabrina surpassed Praxiteles and Donatello.

Who should say she was not a cleverer woman than Etoile?

Certainly Mrs. Pratt left cards little and big on Etoile,

as she would have done on Phryne or Mephistopheles, had she met either of them at Princess Vera's; but Mr. Pratt said to his wife that he was sure there would be something queer about her somewhere which would come out some day, and Mrs. Pratt pursed her mouth to her friend; "Y—e—es. We do receive her. We met her at Princess Vera's. But, *who was she?* That is what I never can learn."

"*Who was she?*" said Mrs. Pratt with sepulchral whisper and solemn stare, and had a way of saying it, and of vaguely implying a great deal by the way she said it, for which Lady Joan could have kissed her, "detestable old woman," with her dukes and duchesses, and rubbish, though the Lady Joan had always considered her to be. For the Lady Joan did not permit other people to air dukes and duchesses; as for herself, dukes and duchesses were all her cousins, and came in handy when she wanted to impress the small fry of society; that was different; when you are born a Perth Douglas, and want to sell a teacup or a tryptich, you must employ the advantages that Nature has given you.

But she was very often so out of temper with herself that neither dukes nor duchesses, teacups or tryptichs could reconcile her to life. She knew very well that when she had been presented at seventeen, handsome, blackbrowed, and Spanish looking, there had been no reason in life why she should not have become an English duchess in her own person. By temper she was ambitious, by nature she longed for place and power; she knew very well that her life was a *coup manqué*; and now and then some irritated pride at the smallness of her aims, and the pigmy proportions of her results, would wake in her, and make her acrid and disappointed and

enraged with her past and her present. There were times when she realised that her life was, after all, obscure and little and ignoble.

Sometimes it made her in such a rage with herself that she shook her fist at the image of her black brows in her mirror. For she was shrewd enough, and—in her own odd way—proud enough, to hate herself heartily at times for all the dust she ate, and all the honey she prepared for the eating of Society. And still more she hated those who had sight enough to see the dust on her mouth, and the honey in her hands, and amongst them she instinctively numbered Etoile.

She began to detest Etoile with that vehement and concentrated dislike which is only the stronger because it cannot explain itself, or put any clear name to its origin.

Something in the glance of Etoile stung her conscience; something in her smile made her pride wince; she was always fancying that Etoile was thinking of all Voightel had told her of those days when the champagne had been in the ice pails on the house tops in Damascus; Voightel had told her nothing, but the Lady Joan would never have credited that. Somehow, too, before Etoile's life—meditative, poetic, studious, always aloof from the world even when in the world—her own life seemed common and bustling, and base and ridiculous. At the bottom of her soul lay a contempt for herself, a bitter and restless contempt: it stirred in her, and stung her in this stranger's presence—and she hated her.

CHAPTER XVI.

"WHY don't people like Etoile?" said Lady Cardiff.

"Don't they like her?" said a Russian Baroness. "I do."

"You do, my dear, I do, a hundred clever people do, but not the majority!"

"I will tell you why," said Princess Vera, who was in her own house, and to whom these ladies had come as an amateur-deputation about a great charity ball at the Capitol.

"Yes, well?" said Lady Cardiff, in expectation of a titbit of news.

"She likes to see the sun rise," said Princess Vera.

"What? The sun rise in winter!"

"In winter and summer. Unnatural, isn't it?" said Princess Vera, lifting her lovely head from an old miniature she was copying. "It is those unnatural tastes that we find unpleasant. The traditional lady who answered naively that she did not care for innocent pleasures was the one candid person of all womanhood, depend on it, and represented a sentiment more general than we like to acknowledge. A woman who does like innocent pleasures is to us just what a writer who won't take money for his books, or a painter who won't sell his pictures, is to all other writers and all other painters. Nothing is so objectionable in anybody as to be above everybody else's tastes and necessities. When we come from our balls feeling ugly and untidy, and *ennuyées*, and see her just coming out of the door beginning the day, we feel to dislike her. It is all the sunrise. Nothing else."

People laughed. Princess Vera, who was always lovely,

and never *ennuyée*, and cared for sunrises herself, could afford to say such things.

Mrs. Henry V. Clams, who was present, felt angry, though she never dared to open her lips before Princess Vera.

"Of course one aren't as neat and spry comin' out as goin' in, and after the cotillon how should we be? but there's no call for her to say so," she thought, feeling personally aggrieved and wondering if Princess Vera had seen her curl drop off into the soup, as it had done at the Japanese Embassy supper on the previous night.

Princess Vera was quite right: Society was naturally suspicious of such a queer taste for sunrises.

Society could never understand it. Why should anybody who wasn't *obliged*, go out early? All the pretty fashionable women who waltzed themselves half out of their sleeveless boddices till sunrise dawned on them drinking hot soup and champagne, and then slept serenely with chloral's benign aid till it was time to have their complexions "done up," never could understand or forgive a woman who walked, drove, or rode in solitude while the dew was still fresh.

For some years the world that talked about her had thought Etoile went out for mysterious intrigues, which intention would have redeemed the unnatural action and made it more natural; but being at length after several seasons compelled to conclude that this explanation was impossible, the eccentricity of the habit could be only annoying.

That she went for mere air, mere exercise, and the charm that lies in the freshness and silence of the early day, was a thing far too simple to be grasped by the astute intelligence of an experienced Society.

The simplicity of the artist is always the stumbling-block of the artist with the world.

One early morning, following this habit, she was wandering alone with her dog under the woods of the Pamphili Doria, where she had especial permission to drive at her pleasure. In the breezy uplands of that lovely place she rambled ankle-deep in violets, lost in thought, the dreamy scholarly fanciful thought which Rome begets in any contemplative mind; suddenly her thoughts were scattered by the excitement and apparent sorrow of Tsar, who ran to and fro, whining and pawing at some object on the grass under the oak trees. On going nearer to the dog, she found outstretched there a woman who had fainted, and was lying insensible.

She was young and handsome, though her face had the gaunt grey leanness of long hunger, and her bones seemed almost starting through the skin. When the woman came to herself, she moaned for her child, refusing to be comforted, and begging to be taken home. "Home" was a miserable garret, in a dark and loathsome lane of crowded hovels.

Etoile had her taken there, and followed her.

In the garret was a baby of two years old; he was rosy and well; the mother had starved herself to give him the little food she could get. By little and little she told her story, a very trite one: she was an Hungarian, a ballet dancer, engaged at fifteen years old to follow a wandering Viennese troop, and, falling ill, left behind them unpaid; for the enterprise had not succeeded. In her poverty and beauty a young French painter had found her and loved her: she had been happy for six months. Then her lover had deserted her, gone to his own country, promising to return; he had written once or twice, but never now for two years. She had no relatives.

and no friends. Dance any more she could not, for her ankle had been broken in a stage trap, and though well again, had been ill set and was stiff. Friendless, sick, and wretched, she had dropped from one depth to another depth, lower and lower, but keeping herself honest that the boy might not blush for her in his manhood.

She had gone into the Pamphili woods to gather violets to sell, and had fainted as she had stooped to the first flower. It was one of those short sad stories which lie thick and common as dust under the roofs of great cities. Death comes and brushes such dust away; and it gathers again by the morrow.

Etoile, returning to see her later in the day, and welcomed in the wretched attic with touching gratitude, found that the poor creature's one desire was to get some means of maintenance for herself and the child in Rome. She could not bear to leave the place where her love's short joys had been known, and where her lover, she always hoped, might one day or other return.

She did not know what to do, but was willing to do anything "that would not make the child ashamed." The sculptors would have paid her to let them model her form, which was symmetrically beautiful; but better death, even for the boy, than that, she thought. She clung with absolute fidelity to her lover's memory.

The hive of wretched houses in which she dwelt was in the heart of Rome, and almost touched the back of the Casa Challoner. When, with an aching heart she left the garret, the little child stretching his arms out after her, and the mother blessing her and her dog too for rescue from the grave, it was twilight in the short wintry day, and the lamp, lighted before the doorway of the Temple of all the Virtues, caught her sight as it glanced through the gloom.

"Perhaps she could help me to help her," thought Etoile. She vaguely doubted in all things the woman who Voightel had said would be to her the Prose of Rome, yet the energy and promptitude of a character utterly opposite to her own as vaguely impressed her by its very unlikeness to herself. The Hungarian girl, in her wretchedness, was only divided by a few yards from the cosy mirthful chambers of the Casa Challoner. To speak of her might perhaps secure her a friend there.

It was a Wednesday, and several of the heavy landaus, that yearly bear to and fro their freight of rich foreign visitors about the streets of Rome, were standing before the house. Etoile descended from her own carriage, and remembered that she ought weeks before to have attended one of these solemn rites.

The house looked curiously changed. It made her think of Sganarelle drawing a long face to feel the patient's pulse.

There was no scent in the Turkish room save from a fountain of eau de Cologne; there was a tea-urn in the Turkish room solemn as a high altar; there were crowds entirely composed of ladies, and serried ranks of dowagers and spinsters bolt upright on the Turkish divans. There was a murmur of small talk like the unending murmur of the sea; the Bishop of Melita and a Dean of St. Edmund's conversed together in the centre of the chamber; Mr. Challoner had become "dear Robert," and was handing bread and butter; and amidst it all stood the Lady Joan with a little ruff round her throat, and a grey gown, who was asking after a baby's health with eager solicitude, and standing with her little girl's curls pressed tenderly to her side, herself smiling sweetly in the face of Mrs. Grundy, as typified at that moment by Lady

George Scrope-Stair and that very proper little person, Mrs. Macscrip.

Mrs. Grundy was in great force, indeed, in all her types there, and the Lady Joan, with her hand on her child's neck, was saying apologetically—

"Well, you know, I don't like it, and that's the truth. Of course there are unpleasant sort of stories, and Mr. Challoner doesn't approve my being much with her. But, you know, I'm always good-natured, and my father is such a dear blind goose——"

"The Comtesse d'Avesnes!" shouted her servant between the silk curtains of her drawing-room doorway.

The serried battalions of Mrs. Grundy's forces fell asunder with a shock, and some dropped their biscuits, and one even dropped her cup. The Lady Joan, however, who never dropped anything except an inconvenient memory or an unremunerative acquaintance, rushed forward with cordial smile and outstretched hands.

"Too good of you. What a pleasure! You, who despise tea-fights, too! Do come to the fire. Effie, go and fetch the cream!"

Little Effie, bringing the cream, looked softly at Etoile, who had been kind to her, and timidly stroked the silver fox furs of her dress.

"I like you," said the child in a nervous little voice. "Why did mama say——?"

"Effie, hand the cake to Lady George," said Mr. Challoner, who was standing on guard by the hearthrug, having just safely left the Bishop and the Dean cordially discussing the state of the Colonial Church. The child, frightened, slid timidly away, and it never occurred to Etoile that the words which she had partially overheard on her entrance could by any chance whatever have referred to herself.

The serried ranks of Mrs. Grundy drew away from the fire, and, as around a safe and holy sanctuary, closed round the tea-table where the Scrope-Stair sisters, in bonnetless intimacy, were presiding over the urn.

"Dear Lady Joan is too good-natured," sighed Mrs. Grundy, *sotto voce*, and the Scrope-Stair sisters murmured back—

"Oh, yes, you know; it is her independence and nobleness. She never *will* believe in the possibility of evil."

Mrs. Grundy shook her head, and glancing towards the fire wondered what the cost of the silver fox furs had been. Why could questionable characters always dress so well? Mrs. Grundy does not always dress well.

Lady Cardiff nodded from her corner by the hearth, where she had ensconced herself with her eye-glass, and motioned Etoile to a seat beside her.

"How do, my dear Comtesse? Cold day, isn't it? What a charming gown. And those *niello* buttons too—delicious! It's quite amusing here; only one's always afraid she'll come out with something for one to buy. If it wasn't for that apprehension it would really be delicious to see her butter all those bores and do the proper for Mrs. Grundy. I've said I'd the tooth-ache, and kept quiet just to watch her. It's great fun. How does she square it with all her little games! But the little games are only the boldness of innocence. So Mimo says. He must know."

Lady Cardiff put up her eye-glass to look at Mrs. Henry V. Clams' Bretonne toilette (the entire costume of a fisher girl, correctly copied, in *feuille-morte* velvet, and navy blue satin, with a *merveilleux* bonnet to crown it appropriately), and Lady Cardiff said aloud for the

benefit of neighbours that His Holiness was very ill, the old trouble in the legs, and then sinking her voice, continued:—

“In Spain, you know, my dear, when a lovely woman has had an adventure, her friends say she has eaten a lily. That’s just what her friends say. She munches her leeks, and they swear they’re lilies. Happy creature! All comes of a wooden husband, as I told you the other day, and her admirable faculty of boring herself to death. She will hear me? Nonsense; she is screaming into Lady George Scrope’s ear-trumpet. If she did hear, she’d only ask me to dinner and sell me a *magot*. That’s her way of revenging herself. She’s been dying to be acquainted with the Monmouthshires for four winters, but they never would let her be introduced to them. (You know whom I mean—the Monmouthshires—she’s the Duke of Brecon’s sister). Well, when I was with them one day last week, in comes my Lady Joan, bold as brass, and with her pockets full of all the sweepings of her *bric-à-brac* shops, and rosaries of olives, that she gathered herself upon Olivet—all these as offerings to Anne Monmouthshire, who is perfectly mad on the subject of a lottery for the blind English in Rome. (I believe there are six of them blind or some such number.) And all these sweepings and olives were for that lottery. The bait took — yes the bait took. Anne Monmouthshire, who always loathed her, has returned her card, and has certainly invited her to a musical party next week. Now *you*, instead of doing a thing like that, only find out sick old folks and do good to them, and let nobody be the wiser!”

“There! there!” said Lady Cardiff, vivaciously, interrupting herself as a haughty-looking dowager, with a very aquiline nose, and very fine sables, sailed into the room.

“Didn’t I tell you so? Just look at her. There’s Anne Monmouthshire actually come on her *day*! Watch her now. Watch her! What eagerness, what cordiality, what ecstasy! Dear me, how very funny it is that anybody born a Perth-Douglas should be such a snob. She pined four whole winters to get the Monmouthshires here, and now she’s done it, just by those shop-sweepings and olives. Really she ought to have been a greater creature than she is! Oh, I see you despise all these things. You are leagues above such considerations. You are governed by your sympathies and your antipathies. You seek or shun other folks by no better rule than their merit or demerit. What can be more indiscreet? You like people who can be of no manner of service to you, and dislike all sorts of great personages. Pardon me, but that is not how society is carried on. Society is an aggregate of personal enemies—all women are all women’s enemies, and most women are most men’s enemies, too, if men did but know it, which they don’t; but hostility should never interfere with prudence. A grain of sand may blind a Sampson, or a Sappho: that is the figure that should always loom large before any of us. Don’t provoke the sand with a whirlwind: take a watering pot. That is where our admirable Lady Joan is preeminent. To look at her she should raise the whirlwind; with an oriental profile and a mastiff’s jaw, one would expect a whirlwind from her. Not a bit of it; she has a nice green watering pot, like a true British horticulturist, and she smooths her sand diligently with a silver shower from the parish pump. The whirlwind does the world good; it clears the mist, it sweeps away the pestilence, it bears the eagles as the sea her ships, and drives the clouds before it. Oh yes, and it’s very nice in epic poetry. But the watering pot is a much meeker domestic servant, and a much more popular

instrument. If you would use the watering pot, my dear, you would never get the dust in your eyes."

Wherewith Lady Cardiff rose and swam away majestically to her friend Anne Monmouthshire, and said very cruelly:

"Didn't know you knew Lady Joan, my love! Delighted to meet you so unexpectedly. Have you come to get any more rosaries? Gathered the olives yourself, dear Lady Joan, didn't you, and on Olivet? Dear me, how charming; just like Noah's dove. Wasn't it Noah's dove?"

Meanwhile Mrs. Henry V. Clams approached Etoile, who always filled her with that uncomfortable sensation, which Burns embodies as the idea, that "a chiel's among us takin' notes," and engaging her timidly in conversation, invited her to dinner—a very great dinner to be given in twelve days from that time.

Etoile declined on the plea that she had come for health, and went out very little. Mrs. Henry V. Clams suddenly felt that the Bretonne costume was loud, and the merveilleux bonnet incongruous. "She's real nasty," thought that good-natured lady.

At that moment there entered a person very unlike the Bishop of Melita and the Dean of St. Edmund's—a graceful and distinguished-looking person, with a charming smile and a perfect bow.

Lady Cardiff put up her eyeglass.

"Dear me! There's Ioris!" she said to her friend, Anne Monmouthshire, whom she had cruelly possessed herself of, and drawn away near the door. "Dear me! Husbands usually shirk these 'days,' but he and Mr. Challoner are really most exemplary. What do I mean? Oh, I don't mean anything, of course, my dear. Nice-looking man, isn't he? Such *race* about him. Somehow

he doesn't go well with the tea-urn, do you think? and the Bishop? You are quite delighted with her? To be sure, why shouldn't you be? I'm sure she tries hard to please you, and she never did anything in the east, you know, but gather those olives; never anything! Such a pretty idea, too, Olives from Olivet!"

Meanwhile, as Ioris entered, the brow of his hostess grew black as night. "You're an hour too early; how could you be such a fool?" she muttered roughly. "You ought always to let 'em all be gone; I've told you so fifty hundred times."

He murmured penitent apologies, greeted the saints around the tea-urn gaily and gracefully, and crossed to the sinner in the silver furs. "I saw your liveries at the door, so I ventured to enter," he murmured to Etoile; Mr. Challoner shifted his eyeglass with a grim smile, and, vacating his post by the fire, asked Mrs. Grundy if the Chemnitz scandal were not a terrible blow to Society. Mr. Challoner always spoke of Society with peculiar tenderness and respect, as if it were his elder brother.

The Baroness Chemnitz, who had dealt this blow, was a beautiful young Roman, with a head as perfect as a narcissus, and a body as graceful as its stem. She had been wedded by a ruined family to a great German capitalist at eighteen. She had decorated his wonderful Louis Quinze houses and Renaissance hotels for some five or six seasons. She had seen all the world dance in her gorgeous rooms until ten in the morning in Paris, Berlin, and Rome. Then a great love had entered into her; a whirlwind of passion that transformed the pale, pensive narcissus into a purple passiflora with a heart of fire. She fell, but she fell grandly. She erred, but she never swerved from her punishment. She faced the wrath of her husband, the fury of her family, the rage of the

world. She confessed herself guilty, and claimed her separation, and left all the gold and the glories of her place, and went out to face solitude—for her lover even turned against her; lovers like Society dislike a storm, and blame a hesitation to deceive. The husband had to be held back by main force from her destruction; she hurled her hatred of him in his teeth, and shook herself free from the trammels of his riches, and went down into the dust of obscurity. What could an outraged Society do?—such a woman as this was unnatural. To old Greek times perhaps she might belong, but born under the Second Empire of France, surely she should have known some better way than this.

She was in love of course—women always were—but then to leave such luxury for love!

What depravity! sighed Society. Such a ball as her last was—diamond rings and sapphire lockets given away like pebbles in the cotillon, and twenty thousand francs spent in forced strawberries alone!—how stupid, when, with a little management, nothing need have been known, you know!—her bedroom hung with white satin, embroidered with wreaths of roses; her footmen to be counted by the score; her lovers like the dreams of Aladdin; and, to leave all that, when with a little tact!—was there ever such unheard-of madness?—to make an abominable *éclat*, when with only a grain of sense no one need have suspected anything!—to lose a fortune counted by trillions, because she could not smile in her lord's eyes, and lie a little gracefully, and manage things quite quietly, as good-breeding teaches every one! What insuperable idiotcy!—what inconceivable baseness! Did she not know better her mere duty to Society?

What did Society care for the woman's agony, for her long temptation, for her piteous feebleness, for the mute

misery with which she had played her part in the gorgeous pageant of her life; for the passionate sickness for one voice, one glance, one touch, which had made her cast away all the pomp and powers of her place, and fling herself into the dust for love alone?

What did they know or care? They only saw a fool who forfeited pride and pleasure and possession; who left wealth and ease and the delights of boundless extravagance behind her as so much dross; who could not lie, who would not be bribed, who would not be content with treachery and vice, but craved for liberty, and stooped to truth! Society was outraged.

If her precedent were followed—what balls would there be to go to? A husband who leapt like a lion to avenge his own dishonour, and a wife who shook off millions like dust from her unfaltering feet! Society was aghast—nothing frightens it like passion. For what does Passion care to amuse Society?

Society with one voice proclaimed Geltrude Chemnitz the vilest of her sex; and, now around the Lady Joan's tea-table, agreed with Mr. Challoner that in these flagrant cases Society could not be too severe. Society, which invited Lady Joan and Ioris to the same entertainments; Society, which smiled and sniggered with vile beneficence on a million illicit unions; Society, which had invented and patronised those blasphemies of "friendship" and fervent parodies of "purity"; Society, which pressed the wife's wedded hand warm from her lover's lips, so long as the husband presided blandly at the desecration of his hearth; Society, which smiled good-humouredly on the "little weaknesses" of post nuptial loves so long as the supplanted lord had neither modesty enough to feel his shame, nor virility enough to take his vengeance; Society, which crowned the adulteress, and welcomed her so long

as she kept a lie upon her mouth, and had a bold front lifted to the gaze of men; Society, which only when the man was roused as man, and the woman could blush as woman, saw "any harm whatever," and only when the doors were shut, the tables feastless, and the world forgot in woe, found out that sin was after all an ugly thing, and faithless wives were wantons.

"It is such a grievous pity when a woman forgets herself!" said the Lady Joan who had danced at the last monster ball in the Louis Quinze rooms, and ordered Io to bring her her chicken and champagne in tones that a kindly duchess would barely use to a steward's room-boy.

She herself never forgot herself; she only forgot other people—when they were of no use to her—which does not matter at all.

What a fool the beautiful wife of Baron Chemnitz looked to her!—to have only one lover in all your life, and let everybody know it, and leave white satin bedrooms and Louis Quinze dining rooms, diamonds as big as marbles, and horses from the imperial haras, and all the rest of it, with a horrible rupture and uproar, so that all Europe heard of the crime!

It made Lady Joan quite ferocious to think what chances other women had and what dire mess and misuse they made of them. Only see what *she* did—with little rooms like band-boxes, and no money to speak of, and never a Louis Quinze mirror in the house at all, unless it were bought to be sold on the morrow.

She felt more respect than ever for herself; and felt that there was some use after all events in a Mr. Challoner, just as there is no doubt in sea-anemones and houseflies, and other inferior creations, whose existence a superior humanity is apt thoughtlessly to resent as use-

lessly and insignificantly superfluous, and occasionally prominently disagreeable.

"My! It's a caution, aren't it!" said Mrs. Henry V. Clams thoughtlessly, biting a piece out of a bit of Madeira cake.

Lady Joan looked severe as Diana Nemorensis. A caution! Who wanted "a caution" in good society? Did not Mrs. Daniel V. Clams know that she was eating cake in the temple of all the Virtues?

"It is disgusting; perfectly disgusting," she said with severity. "And to think we all went to her only last week! Really, it is quite horrible, isn't it? It makes one almost feel ashamed oneself."

"I don't see no call to do that," said Mrs. Henry V. Clams, reddening a little, for she had brought a sort of conscience out of the land of wooden nutmegs, and never could attain the sublime audacity of the Lady Joan's panoply of perfection. "I don't see no call to do that. We aren't no kith or kin to her, poor soul. Oh, my! she'll miss it fine, I reckon—do you mind that *rivière* Chemnitz gave her New Year's Day? Pearls as big as plover's eggs, weren't they now? She must be downright vicious."

"Innate depravity!" said the Lady Joan. "Well, she'll starve now thank goodness. She hasn't a penny of her own you know."

And the ladies present who had all danced and drunk, and borne off the costly cotillon toys from the Chemnitz balls throughout four carnivals, agreed that she ought to starve; all except Mrs. Henry V. Clams, who was too good-natured, and whose conscience was pricking her.

The Prince Ioris turned round in the low chair where he sat by the hearth beside Etoile, and murmured a word in favour of his lovely country woman.

"The blame is hardly Geltrude's," he said gently; "I knew her from her infancy; she was of the sweetest nature; but her people forced her into a marriage that she loathed; she was frank and fearless, and our women are not cold, mesdames; love to them——"

"Hold your tongue, Io! This is not the place to talk in such a way," said Lady Joan sharply with a heavy frown. "There is no excuse for Madame Chemnitz; not the slightest. She should have done her duty. It was certainly gilded enough to make it easy!"

Ioris was silent, and turning back again to the fire, resumed his conversation with Etoile. When your lady-love arrays herself in ruffs and farthingale of social virtue, there is obviously nothing to do but to be silent. You cannot quarrel with her for having managed so well that, whilst she smiles upon you she yet makes the world smile on her: it would be both impolite and ungrateful.

"I am pained for Chemnitz; very pained; what can riches compensate to a man for dishonour?" said Mr. Challoner, sternly gazing at the teapot. The assembled ladies murmured applause to so beautiful if hackneyed a sentiment.

"Lord! what a liar that man is!" thought Mrs. Henry V. Clams, and went to her carriage to take up Fontebranda at the club.

Fontebranda never asked her to make Mr. Henry V. Clams lie in that manner: Fontebranda only said to her, "Get a great cook; give three big balls a winter, and drive English horses: you need never consider Society then, it will never find fault with you, *ma très-chère*."

She did not quite understand, but she obeyed; and Society never did. Society says to the members of it as the Spanish monk to the tree that he pruned, and that cried out under his hook:—

"It is not beauty that is wanted of you, nor shade, but olives."

Moral loveliness or mental depth, charm of feeling or nobleness of instinct, beauty, or shade, it does not ask for, but it does ask for olives—olives that shall round off its dessert, and flavour its dishes, and tickle its sated palate: olives that it shall pick up without trouble, and never be asked to pay for: these are what it likes.

Now it is precisely in olives that the woman who has one foot in Society and one foot out of it will be profuse.

She must please, or perish.

She must content, or how will she be countenanced?

The very perilousness of her position renders her solicitous to attract and to appease.

Society follows a natural selfishness in its condonation of her; she is afraid of it, therefore she must bend all her efforts to be agreeable to it! it can reject her at any given moment, so that her court of it must be continual and expansive. No woman will take so much pains, give so much entertainment, be so willing to conciliate, be so lavish in hospitality, be so elastic in willingness, as the woman who adores Society, and knows that any black Saturday it may turn on her with a bundle of rods, and a peremptory dismissal.

Between her and Society there is a tacit bond.

"Amuse me, and I will receive you."

"Receive me, and I will amuse you."

Meanwhile Lady Joan dismissed, one by one, the whole battalion of Mrs. Grundy's forces, and the lighter squadrons of airy ladies who had carried off the gold toys from the Chemnitz cotillons, and heard the carriages of the deans and the dowagers, and the bankers' wives, and the more modest cabs of the minor acquaintances,

roll away towards the Corso in the dusk. The Scrope-Stairs bonneted and cloaked themselves, and also prepared to depart.

"They are excellent persons," Ioris had said confidentially of them to Etoile, that day in the corner by the fire:—" *Màh! mi seccano!* They are the sort of women we put in convents in our country. It is terrible that the English have nowhere to put their unmarriageable women, but can only let them overrun other lands, like flocks of goats, stray and unhappy."

"You are very ungrateful; they adore you, all these sisters."

"Oh! *C'est le pire défaut!*" had rejoined Ioris with his light laugh.

But the Scrope-Stairs sisters, assisting at the tea-table, had heard nothing of this, and little divined what he had been saying as he had sat in the corner by the fire, in the low chair that Lady Cardiff had vacated.

"Io," said Lady Joan, as the sisters embraced her in adieu, and with that glitter of wrath in her eyes which Ioris knew but too well; "the girls can't go by themselves, and I can't spare anybody. See them home, will you? Get back by seven; Ronsoulet will be here, you know, and Victor."

Ioris glanced at Etoile, hesitated, sighed, and offered his escort to the sisters.

"They might go from the Campidoglio to Soracte, no one would stop them," he thought to himself, but courtesy was his nature, and obedience to his tyrant was second nature.

"He'd have gone home with *her* if I hadn't sent him off," thought the Lady Joan, wondering why Etoile still remained in the low chair by the fire.

"I lingered behind your other visitors because I want

your advice if you will give it me," said Etoile, as though answering her thoughts, as the door closed upon Ioris, and Mr. Challoner vanished into his own den.

She responded eagerly, all attention in an instant, remembering that Etoile had bought a good deal of brocade.

"Delighted! Anything I can do—only tell me. What is it?"

To her view 'helping people' always meant advising them to buy *bric-à-brac*, and who heartily resolved that if it meant furniture, china, or stuffs, she must send Mimo a hint to get out all the best things he had, and to mind all the marks and the millesimes were correct.

Etoile sat down beside her, and told her the story of the dancing-girl who was starving behind the wall of her house.

"The little boy is lovely," she said, when she had ended the sad little history, "and the woman, I am sure, would interest you if you saw her. She would die, and even let the child die, sooner than be faithless to her faithless lover."

Lady Joan listened with cooled interest. Since it was not teacups and tryptichs, why was she bored about it?

"Very interesting, no doubt," she said drily. "But rather immoral, don't you think?"

"Immoral? No; there are many things more immoral—Mrs. Henry V. Clams, for instance."

The Lady Joan winced. She hesitated a moment whether she would seem very virtuous or seem very charitable and beyond all prejudices.

"It is too kind of you to be so interested," she said at length. "You must tell it all to Io; he'll be rushing off directly, with soup in one hand and bank-notes in the

other. Certainly, the girl's case is very sad; but then, you see, she brought it on herself. Why did she listen to her painter before she saw the marriage-lines? I should think your best way would be to speak to the Austrian Consul, or perhaps your Princess Vera would condescend. I think they'd send her back for nothing, and I suppose she has some friends?"

"None, I believe," said Etoile. "But do not trouble yourself; it will not cost much to set her up in some little trade that will enable her to keep herself and the boy. That is all I meant to ask your advice about;—"

"Of course I would do anything in charity that I could," said Lady Joan, vaguely feeling that she had made a wrong move. "But a ballet girl and an illegitimate child and all that—one hardly knows what to do. I've just sent a house-maid away for light conduct. One must be just—one must not put a premium on immorality."

"It is a pity Society often allows so high a one!" answered Etoile with that flash of contempt which the Casa Challoner was learning to fear. Lady Joan, however, was always ready for any thrust.

"I don't think Society does," she answered; she always defended Society since Society accepted her. "It gives certain rules, and if you keep to them it has no business to attack you, and never does in point of fact. Women are rash themselves and headstrong, and do foolish things, and then they complain of Society. I've no prejudices—not one—I would just as soon shake hands with your ballet-girl as with a duchess. But, you see, as long as one lives in the world one can't follow every impulse of one's heart, and these poor girls just throw themselves away on some headlong passion, and then think it very cruel of humanity not to be ready with

gold christening cups and rose silk cradles for their babies. Their fate's very dreadful and very hard, no doubt, but they make it themselves, you see."

"By forgetting themselves, which women in Society never do, no doubt."

"Of course they never do, except that ass of a Geltrude Chemnitz! If you don't remember yourself, who will?" said the Lady Joan with a pleasant laugh, ignoring the equivoque. "As for the world well lost for love, and all that, it's rubbish you know. The world is too strong for anybody that sets up against it. And when you've lost the world, *i.e.*, your bread and cheese in it, love flies out of the window. That's common sense."

"It would be common sense then if this poor Hungarian descended to infamy to feed herself."

"Just so. Having once slipt into the pit to gather a flower, she ought to go down to the bottom to pick up a bit of silver. But that's the sort of consistency you poetical creatures never possess. You will fling yourselves to perdition in a *furia* of self-sacrifice, and then you are supremely astonished that the world only thinks you a donkey, whose legs are broken. Society can't classify. It only lays down a few broad lines, and packs into two sets the people who keep in 'em, and the people who jump over 'em. Unjust? Oh, I daresay. But the thing is so. It's no good kicking against the pricks. No doubt Magdalen is a charming person, utterly underrated, and very much misjudged, and all the rest of it; but all that common folk can judge by is that she has dragged her hair in the dust, and has made a beast of herself——"

"Without corresponding advantages!"

Lady Joan laughed, but when she was on her high horse of morality, she rode it with cynicism indeed, but

with consummate coolness, and would now and then enumerate opinions with which Hannah More herself could have found no fault. Indeed, to do her justice, women who sacrificed themselves—at a loss—did seem to her “too poor for heaven, and too pale for hell.”

“I am shocked at you,” she said, with her frankest smile. “What is the use of railing against Society? Society, after all, is only Humanity *en masse*, and the opinion of it must be the opinion of the bulk of human minds. Complaints against Society are like the lions’ against the man’s picture. No doubt the lions would have painted the combat as going just the other way, but then, so long as it is the man who has the knife or the gun, and the palette and the pencil, where is the use of the lions howling about injustice? Society has the knife and the pencil; that’s the long and the short of it; and if people don’t behave themselves they feel ’em both, and have to knock under. They’re knifed first, and then caricatured—as the lions were. I can’t see so much injustice myself. The world’s a very pleasant place, if you’ll only keep straight in it.”

And the Lady Joan pulled up the ruffles of old lace about her shapely throat, and glanced with a little grin at two big envelopes just come in: invitations to a ball at the Macscrips, and a dramatic representation at one of the minor Legations.

Etoile bade her good evening, and went away; left alone, she snapped her fingers at the deserted tea-table, jumped a step or two of a bolero, lit a cigar, and going to her chamber, got into a gown of loose eastern brocade with gold threads shining in it, twisted a string of amber beads round her head, and felt dressed appropriately for the guests she expected: Victor Louche, a second-class French dramatist, and M. Ronsoulet, a very great sculptor,

with Madame Pâtauge, who was Madame Ronsoulet *de facto*, but not *de jure*. They were tonic that she required after a Wednesday afternoon.

Society is like the porter of your Paris house. It frowns and bars the door, or rushes to bring all the keys to you, according as you have filled its pockets, or have left them empty. Lady Joan knew her porter.

She was not rich, indeed, not even with all the tea-cups and tryptichs in the world; but then she knew how to be obliging; she would run up the back stairs to spare the porter any trouble about the front, and when the porter was grumpiest and sulkiest, would look up in his face and smile. No porter could long resist such conduct: not even the grim porteresse that is called Mrs. Grundy.

But there is an amount of fatigue in being so very considerate to your porter, and Lady Joan always recompensed herself for her consideration with some little pleasant indulgence or other when the porter could not see through her keyhole.

In a sense, too, she liked the sharp and strong contrasts of her life. She loved the bisque soup after the barley broth; the caviare toast after the boiled sole with herbs. She liked keeping the goats and the sheep apart, and frisking up the wild glens with the one, and feeding in the fat pastures with the other. She liked lunching decorously off cold lamb with a clergyman's family, and talking of her dear friends the deans and the bishops, and she liked going to an artists' ball afterwards, and dancing and screaming till the daylight shone in at the windows. She liked driving staidly about with her great cousin of Hebrides with the white wanded footmen of Hebrides behind, and she liked rattling the same nights about the streets, in the white Roman moonlight, in a

hired cab, with her friends, singing choruses. She liked having a bevy of married and maiden dames to tea on a Tuesday afternoon, and enchanting them with old laces miraculously purchased, and pattern opinions miraculously fabricated; and she liked dining at home that evening with a few choice spirits who quoted Beaudelaire in a haze of smoke, and brought out the suggestive little statuettes, and held that none but fools could believe in any deity under any name, and quoted as their amatory gospel, "*l'amour, c'est la femme d'un autre.*"

On the whole, there was much wisdom in these ways of life. She saw life in all its aspects, and got credit from all its actors. And she seldom made mistakes in either the dull comedy or the gay one—except, indeed, when sometimes she talked too long to a cynic or met the eyes of a guileless woman.

At such times she would quail a little, and feel as though, despite all her cashmeres of conventionality and sables of content, some one had stript her naked in the full blaze of a noonday sun.

Her guests came in all together, laughing, happy, and goodhumoured, bringing with them much sparkle of fresh wit, and much smell of stale smoke, into the chambers where Mrs. Grundy had sat in august majesty but an hour before.

Victor Louche was a thin, sallow man, with a pungent tongue and a salacious humour, who lived amongst actors and actresses, and was the life and soul of winter nights at Bignon's, and summer days at Etretat; Madame Pâtauge was a cheery soul, with much mirth, many anecdotes, and a repertory of all the liveliest songs of the last half-century, which she could still sing with power and zest, like the female Lablache that she was. Madame Pâtauge, originally the daughter of a house-porter in

Paris, in days when Louis Philippe was king, knew her Paris as a child its nurse; she had gone on the stage of the Opéra Comique and been successful; she had married a journalist, who had beaten her and spent her money; she had consoled herself in the atelier of M. Ronsoulet, when he was unknown to fame, and had finally settled down permanently side by side with him when he became famous. She was a very big woman, with a very big voice, and M. Ronsoulet, who was a very little man, spent life much as a pigmy might do chained between the four paws of an elephant. But it was a good-natured elephant, and was totally unconscious that it crushed him; it thought, indeed, that carrying him about by its trunk was a benefit; female elephants have these delusions.

She was an honest soul; she never sought to conceal what she had been, or what she was; when she had quarrelled with her husband she had abused him soundly, packed up her trunks, and departed from under his roof, with the frankest avowal of her intentions; she never concealed either the storms or the sunshine of her adventurous years; and she adored Ronsoulet with an adoration as big as her person. Nevertheless, a world which accepted the Lady Joan rejected this poor Madame, who was only Ronsoulet by courtesy. She was *mal vue* by Society, though she was a hundred times the better, truer, tenderer, and worthier woman. In fact, Society would have blushed to have been supposed to have even known the mere fact of her existence.

Lady Joan invited this trio of sorry sinners to dinner because the songs and anecdotes tickled her palate; because after Mrs. Grundy at tea she required mental tonic and refreshment; because Ronsoulet would make her own bust for nothing; because Victor Louche had always

known a good deal about her; because—there were fifty becauses. Besides nobody knew of these bohemian banquets; her servants never talked; and if she were seen driving up to the little villa outside Porta Pia, where M. M. Ronsoulet and Louche were living together, she only went to have her bust modelled—that was all.

“Do you speak to that creature?” said Society to her once when the good-tempered fat woman smiled, and nodded, and waved hands to her in delightful recognition across the crowd on the Pincio. Such contretemps will now and then occur to the most perfect diplomatists. And the Lady Joan replied with that frank regard which always told her intimate friends when she was lying with the most hardihood:

“Well, you know, Mr. Challoner’s always telling me I’m too good-natured to people. But I see her at Ronsoulet’s studio. What can I do? One must just bow. I haven’t the heart to cut people; I’m so weak about all that. Besides, you know I have not the stiff ideas of other women; my poor mother was always so over-kind to all artists. You see *we* are so well known. We can do things other folks can’t. Nobody ever can say a word against us.”

So Society gave her much credit, alike for frankness, spirit, and propriety, a triad seldom allowed to exist in unison; and it was the general feeling in society that she was a very excellent young woman, and that it was high treason against her to suppose for a moment that she had any other attractions up at Fiordelisa than her bees and her beasts, her pigs and her poultry.

On the whole Lady Joan was as successful as that ingenious smuggler who traded in sheep, to run brandy ashore, and whose upper deck was crowded with innocent lambs, while the alcohol that cheated the revenues reposed

cask against cask, all snug and unseen, underneath in the hold.

"Is it worth the trouble?" landsmen wonder, seeing the contraband sloops hover off the Spanish shores; "is it worth so much calculation, so many risks, such constant oscillation between safety and ruin?" The contrabandists will tell you that it is—that no money rings so cheerily as his, and no wine tastes so well.

Lady Joan had the same opinion.

Her's were only small gains like the smuggler's—a duchess's bow, an ambassadress's nod, cards to half a hundred houses, bankers' balls, clergyman's praises, American dinners—no more than the smuggler's dollars and tobacco. But then these were everything to her. Some desire the Apple of Hesperides, others only hunger for a sweet potato. Lady Joan was of this wise other section. And she bought her sweet potato in the right market, and ate it, and was happy.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE Scrope-Stair sisters made a Cerberus quite invaluable stationed for ever at the hall door of the Casa Challoner.

Cerberus of Hades was but a primitive and one-ideaed beast, whose sole office was to prevent miserable sinners from escaping their punishment. This Cerberus of society was a much more civilised being, and had the advanced views proper to its epoch—the epoch that has the Triangle instead of Troy. Cerberus, by alternately fawning and growling, induced Society to swallow the discrepancies of the Casa Challoner, as Cerberus itself had swallowed them. And it is only this first swallowing that is any

trouble. An impropriety to Society is like a fishbone in the human throat; fifty to one it will not slip down, but if once it pass all faces are calm; the fishbone is accepted in safety, and will be heard of no more. A little butter will be taken after it—nothing else.

Old Lord George had not utterly forgotten that he had once been a man of the world, though he had adopted an air of sleepy senility, which kept him out of rows and served him well; and old Sir George would watch the Lady Joan with a twinkle in his eye, and take her measure very correctly. He kept his lids half shut, and was very hard of hearing for the majority of the world, and could act a cross between King Lear and Poor Tom, with an admirable skill when any quarrel was going on around him. But he had not forgotten that he had once been "handsome Scrope" in the guard-room of St. James's, and he appraised his daughter's friend very neatly, and did not like his daughter's friendship. But what could he do all alone?

Middleway stayed up there; the pious Middleway, who talked of Providence as his own Senior Partner, and of Paradise as a sort of bonus awarded for thrifty and timely insurance; Middleway dined at the Casa Challoner, and took his beloved girls to Fiordelisa, strong in their maiden innocence and their blond chignons. To be sure there was the Seventh Commandment printed amongst its brethren in any church where Middleway officiated; the Seventh Commandment in all the glaring outspokenness and culpable heedlessness of the feelings of Society, of which Moses, like too many other great writers, was guilty, and there were times when the excellent Middleway felt that the Decalogue ought, like the Decameron, to be edited in more polite language. But still, qualms or no qualms, Middleway lunched with Mrs. Henry V. Clams,

and visited at Fiordelisa, and where Middleway, austere though charitable, boldly trod, how should poor old trembling Lord George dare to refuse to enter?

Besides, there was Marjory!

At the thought of Marjory all rebellion would die out of him; Marjory, with her pinched lips, her sharp voice, and her resolute will, who, if he ventured to cross her wishes, would never let him have a brazier of charcoal, or a glass of whiskey, or a banknote in his pocket ever again throughout his dreary days, but would remind him fifty times oftener than she did already, that if he had not been a spendthrift his daughters would not now have to trudge through mud and dust to copy gallery canvasses and chapel frescoes. There was Middleway and there was Marjory—so old Lord George stifled his conscience, and let the mutton from Fiordelisa be set upon his table, and the eggs from Fiordelisa be broken into his sherry, and pretended to be dozing in the sun when the Lady Joan on the terrace of Fiordelisa called Ioris to her feet. He was a gentleman at heart, this poor worn-out, weary octogenarian; he had been an English soldier, and was still an English gentleman, and sometimes he felt ashamed. But he had grown timid with age, and his home was chill and dreary, and his daughters bade him obey, and he did obey, and Lady Joan sent him new eggs and fresh vegetables with the most grateful regularity. She had grown rather bored with Cerberus, but Cerberus was still very useful to her, and she threw the admirable watch dog the tit-bits she knew it desired.

She called them darling girls, though they were older than herself, had them always to her second-rate dinners, gave them patterns for gowns, took them to the theatres, sent them game and honey and wine, had them to stay

at Fiordelisa, and above all, let Marjory feast her eyes on Ioris.

Poor Marjory, in the beginning of time when Lady Joan had first arrived from Abana and Pharphar, Orontes and Euphrates, with her huntress's blood all on fire for want of something to kill, had not been a watch-dog, she had been a catspaw.

Before Lady Joan had reached the sublime heights of intrepidity from which she now invited the Church to lunch up at Fiordelisa, whilst she was still under that certain chill and awe of that vision of the British Bona Dea which had loomed before her on her landing at Brindisi, she had deemed it worth while to be prudent.

In pursuit of prudence she had bade Ioris pay a semblance of court to her dear friend Marjory, and took Marjory about with her conspicuously. Ioris laughed, pitied himself, and obeyed. He played his part gracefully in the meaningless comedy, and its victim based upon it her wildest hopes, as baseless as they were wild. When she perceived that she had been but fooled—used as the mere screen of another's convenience—the passion of that fading hope survived the death of hope. She consumed her heart in rage and misery, but consumed it in silence. To break with the Casa Challoner would have been to lose all sight of Ioris; she continued to kiss her friend in public and private, and nurtured her unspoken passion in her breast, feeding it hungrily on every look and tone and gesture of her friend's lover. She saw what her friend did not see; she foresaw the time when the proverb would hold good that too much tying loosens. She marked her friend's mistakes, and gauged the power of her friend's tyranny, she saw when the chain was strained, and laid in wait for some dim future, as the grey adder hides under the stone.

She loved him with the terrible love of the woman who hungers for a life that will no more come to her than the silver moon in summer will come to a child's cries; who knows that his hours, his thoughts, his senses, are all another's and will never be hers, yet dreams of some day when disaster or disappointment may drag him down within her grasp, and whispers in the hush of the night to her own sick soul—"Who knows, who knows?"

The comedy had long ceased to be played and the years had gone by since then, but the desire of the moth for the star still burnt on, and the gentle grace, the tender familiarity, the kindly courtesy of his ways with women fed the smouldering fire with every unthinking action; she knew that it was useless, hopeless, rootless, but still, in the dreary routine and repression of her days, she hugged closer this one sweetness: only to see him, to hear him, be where he was, this she deemed better than nought; she fought firmly for the Temple of all the Virtues because on its altars her own hopes smouldered, and when she defended the innocence of its rites there was so robust a ring of sincerity in her voice because it hurt her so fiercely to think of those long amorous summers, which the nightingales of Fiordelisa hymned.

Lady Joan knew her folly well enough, and gleefully grinned over it in secret, and even approved of it. It was useful to her, the one supreme test-weight by which the Lady Joan balanced all things.

"If the poor ass likes to fret herself to fiddle-strings after Io—let her," said the Lady Joan in her thoughts; and Lady Joan in public kissed her with effusion, before a dozen spinsters, and took her often to the theatres, and said to everybody, "If Io would only be persuaded to marry that dear darling good girl!—but he won't hear of

it, you know—such a pity—such friends as we all are, it would be delightful!”

Meantime, Marjory Scrope grew passive, if not resigned, as the seasons swept on, and accepted the reign of the Lady Joan as inevitable, and would have been even willing to make common cause with her against any invader of her sovereignty, and, sharp of eye and ear, saw many a sign that escaped the happy and blind vanity of her friend: heard many a yawn, detected many a gesture of weariness and impatience, and had almost ceased to be jealous of what she saw had to him become but a habit. But at any gleam of a fresh interest, any glance of a new thought for him, she sprang up as a snake springs—not the Lady Joan herself could ever have been as swift to see it, as ferocious to resent it, as she was.

And, with the prescience of an unerring way, the hatred of Marjory Scrope-Stairs had darted down and fastened on Etoile.

Marjory, indeed, was hardly used. Jacob for Rachel had not served more devotedly than she for six years had served the Lady Joan for the wage of proximity to Ioris. She had toiled early and late; she had copied old frescoes and let the Lady Joan sell them; she had worked chairs and cushions, and finished lace that her friend had begun and got tired of; she had never minded being asked at the eleventh hour to fill up a place at a dinner, unexpectedly left vacant; she had trudged through sludge and sleet on bitter winter days, to ransack curiosity barrows for the Casa Challoner; and, finally, she had gone about in society armed *cap-à-pie* in defence of that Temple of all the Virtues, and made herself generally ridiculous with a stubbornness and a heroism worthy of a far better cause. She had led a hard, dull, joyless life. She had been a watch-dog, and been bound to take blows

and be out in all weathers; she had been a screen and had borne all the brunt of the fire, and been pushed aside when not wanted; she had been a catspaw, and was left with burnt fingers and sore heart out in the cold whilst her clever friend gleefully munched the fruit. She had been hardly dealt with for six mortal years; but she had been able to bear it all for sake of that baseless, shapeless, yet inextinguishable hope which had sustained her. She had grown used, with the dull pain of an old half-healed wound, to seeing the supremacy of the Lady Joan.

But now!—She hated the new-comer with that deadly hatred which has no pity as it has no parallel; the hatred of an obscure and discontented woman for the woman who is eminent and adored.

Etoile herself never thought about her at all, save to feel compassion for her vaguely as the slavey of Society, and the shadow of the Lady Joan. But Marjory Scrope thought of her from morn till night, watched her gestures, studied her every word, hated her for the very *frou-frou* of her skirts, the mere silent softness of her sweeping velvets; hated her beyond all for the look that the eyes of Ioris gained whenever they gazed on her; and in the stillness of the nights dreamed of her, and waking, muttered, “I have borne enough—never will I bear *that!*—never, never, never!”

“Take the watering-pot,” had said that wise woman of the world, Lady Cardiff.

Perhaps, if Etoile had taken the watering-pot—if she had drunk tea at the Scrope-Stairs, given the Scrope-Stairs a few pretty things, praised the Scrope-Stair drawings, and bought a water-colour of the School of Athens—even this sandstorm of envy and hatred might have been allayed. But that was not her way.

"My dear, you never seem to fear the mob," said Lady Cardiff. "It is just the mob that builds up guillotines; and the woman who has genius is just Marie Antoinette to it, 'the accursed proud Austrian'—and the mob howls till the axe falls."

No doubt it was a true exordium: but Etoile feared the mob no more than did the daughter of Maria Theresa.

This night, when the Lady Joan sternly bade her knight attend the knightless damsels to their home, Ioris obeyed. He was aware of the hopeless passion he had long before inspired, and pitied the woman who felt it, and was friends with her in the same kindly, courtly, gentle spirit with which he took off his hat to the old orange woman at the corner, and asked the cobbler's wife in the cellar how her rheumatism fared. It was tiresome to him to go out of his way in the damp chilly night, with the snow beginning to fall, to escort Cerberus whom his mistress had chosen for the nonce to dress up as a Una, without a lion. But he did the behest chivalrously, and went with the sisters gaily and courteously to their dull, old, dark, long palace down by the Forum Trajano, and having discharged his duty, thought that he had justly earned a little recreation.

Ioris, with people he disliked, was apt to pour out on them a graceful effusion which they took for cordiality and regard. They were never more mistaken in their lives. To women who wearied him, to men he mistrusted, to enemies always, and to strangers generally, Ioris was courtier enough by habits, and meridional enough in nature, to be unrelaxing in courtesy, and ardent in protestation; amiability is the armour of the South, as much as rudeness is of the North.

In the dusk on the staircase that night, Ioris as he

had escorted Cerberus had seen a jewel shining on the stone, had stooped for it, and recognised a black onyx medallion, with a monogram in pearls, which he remembered seeing once about the throat of Etoile. He did not send it upstairs to her by the servant, as he might have done, since he had left her sitting by the fire, but said nothing of it to his companions, and slipped it into his pocket. His escort ended, and the sisters safe at home, he went to his own home, dined hastily, and calling about eight o'clock, at the house on the Monte Cavallo, sent to know if the Comtesse d'Avesnes would receive him.

Etoile, her own brief dinner ended, was sitting in a low chair by the hearth, with great Tsar at her feet, looking over some old prints, Marcantonios amidst them, which she had bought that morning.

The room was large, but warm; great bowls of flowers stood on the marble tables; old tapestries and embroideries were scattered about, there were sketches here and there; the hearth as wide and open; oak logs were burning on it, and their flame shone red on the *giallo antico* of its huge carved chimneypiece; a marble copy of the Belvidere Mercury which she had bought stood near, with a cluster of rose-red azaleas in vases around it; and a bronze of the Vatican Jove was half-hidden in white camellias. A certain sense of home fell on Ioris as he entered—a sense that never touched him in his own lonely house or within the chambers of the Casa Chal-loner.

Etoile, who was dressed in white stuffs, that fell softly about her, and had a knot of geranium at her throat, turned, with a smile, as she saw him.

“Is it anything very urgent? Has Lady Joan found a fault in the Venetian costume?”

A shadow passed over his mobile face at the name; he came forward and dropped on one knee by the hearth.

"Nothing urgent; and perhaps you will rebuke me for an intrusive impertinence. I had the fortune to find this to-night, and I could not resist restoring it into your own hands."

She gave a cry of pleasure.

"Oh, that is very good of you. My dear locket! I had just sent to advertise for it. You shall look in it for your reward."

"May I indeed?"

She pressed the secret spring for him, and he saw the portrait of Dorotea Coronis.

His heart beat with a quick relief. He had expected to see some face of his own sex.

"The Duchesse Santorin is very happy to have such a friend," he said gravely.

"But you barely look at it; there is no more beautiful face in Europe."

"I do not care to look at it," said Ioris, and his soft eyes gazed at her own face.

Etoile felt her cheek grow warm—she could not tell why—and she drew a little away.

"Make Tsar move farther—he has very bad manners—and rise up, Prince Ioris. There is a pleasant chair there."

"Will you not call me Io? Everyone does."

"I do not care to do what everyone does," she answered him, a little impatiently. She seemed to hear the "Io! Io!" of Lady Joan's imperious demand ringing loudly over hill and vale by the banks of the Almo.

He caressed Tsar, and sank into the chair near her, within the warmth of the hearth.

"You are all alone? You are going to spend your evening alone?"

She smiled.

"'Never less alone than when alone.' It is fortunate for me that I feel so, for I have always been left very much to myself."

"But surely——"

"You mean I might be out somewhere to-night? Oh, yes: and any other nights. But I do not care very much for society—not even for that of Paris. In my own house there I receive a good deal: that I like; but society is monotonous: it has no infinite variety, as study has and art. Besides, I think the artist, like the saint, should keep himself 'unspotted from the world' as far as possible. It only dims our sight and dwarfs our aims."

"And you are not very strong in health, I fear."

"They say so. Perhaps I have tried to do too much too early."

"The perfect fruit and flower have been too much for the young tree that bore them."

"Perfect! Ah, if you could only know how ill-content I am with all that men call great in what I do; how poor and pale the best is beside the visions that I see!"

"That of course. What Raffaele has left us must be to the glories he imagined as the weaver's dye to the sunset's fires. Tell me—you have been in Rome before?"

"Never. I studied in Belgium and in Paris—nowhere else; but to be taught by Israels was almost an atonement for the loss of Rome. But it is because I lost Rome in my student days that I cannot endure to waste any hours here in the mere distractions of Society which I can have anywhere else. In your city it is so easy to 'be with the immortals.' I wander in your wonderful haunted places

as long as it is light, and then when evening comes on I am tired."

"You do wisely for yourself—though cruelly to others."

"Ah, pray do not make me compliments: I dislike them. We are not in Society now; we can be natural."

"You always doubt my sincerity."

"No, not always. Tsar would not like you so well if you could not be true sometimes."

Ioris lifted up the noble head of the dog and kissed him.

"I think I am always true—except when *she* makes me false," he murmured as he stooped to the hound. "Madame, tell me more of yourself. You cannot think what interest it has for me. Nay, I am saying no flattery now, but the simplest fact. When the world says 'Etoile' everyone wonders; I have wondered with the rest. Do not be angered."

"Why should I be? I will tell you anything you like. Not that there is much to tell. My years are written on my panels and canvases. I have lived between the studio and the open air."

There was something dreamy and familiar in the warm, wood-scented air, the mellow light, the bright hearth, the shadowy, fragrant chamber. It seemed to Ioris that he had been there all his life watching the glow from the fire fall on the white folds of her dress and finding out the red geraniums at her throat; whilst little by little, in the easy communicativeness of fireside talk, the various changes of her life, with its ambitions and its fruitions, passed before him, and her words built up to his fancy the little village on the green Meuse waters and the dull old house in the gardens of the Luxembourg.

Etoile very seldom spoke of herself.

She had grown to see that no one ever believed a word she said; so silence had become a habit with her.

What they expected she did not know; nor, perhaps, did they any better. But the mere truth never had a chance of being credited. It never has.

"Truth is a gem that loves the deep" applies to truth metaphysical, historical, philosophical. But truth personal is rather a flower like the briar rose, too homely, too simple, and too thorny for men to care to gather it. They like a lie, which, like the barometrical flower, will change its colour half a dozen times a day.

With Ioris she had a different feeling. She was willing to talk to him, glad to take him back with her in fancy to her childish days. He listened with that soft, mute attention, that homage of scarce-broken silence, which his gaze made more eloquent than the most eager words of other men. The firelight shone on his delicate dark head; his eyes were dreamy, musing, tender. The moments sped swiftly away and became hours. At last he drew a deep breath, as of a man who casts off a burden of dread.

"And amidst it all—you have never loved!"

"Loved!" echoed Etoile, in a vague, startled sort of surprise. Her face grew warm; she felt troubled, she could not have told why.

"Is it true?" he persisted. "It is true, is it not, you have never loved anyone?"

Etoile bent forward and put back a burning piece of wood that had fallen too far. As she did so one of the geranium flowers fell out from amongst the blossoms at her throat. He caught it from the fire.

"Answer me," he said eagerly. "Is it true?"

"Certainly true—yes. But I do not know why——"

He put the scarlet flower in his breast.

"Why I have the daring to ask you so personal a question? Only to ask it seems a profanation, and I need not have asked it—for I knew——"

"What can you mean? What can you know?"

"I knew that it was so before you spoke a word. The first night I saw you I said in my thoughts, 'That woman has no past;' for a woman who has had no passion has no past, no more than those flowers, born to-day, that are at your breast. Then I studied those scattered poems that are signed 'Etoile,' and I was yet more sure. You write of love from without, not from within. It is a thing you have read of, dreamed of, built up to yourself in fancy, but have not felt. You theorise on it externally, as you might of life in some far planet more beautiful than earth. But love, you know—no, you do not know—is a fiercer, fonder, aye, and perhaps, a grosser and viler thing than you have ever been touched by. You have said to yourself, 'I shall love like that some day.' You have not said to yourself, 'I loved like that in a day that is dead.' Now, between those two there is such a gulf—such an abyss—such a sea of flame! And when you have crossed that gulf you will not look at us all any longer with those clear, candid, wondering eyes, as if you had strayed down out of a better world than ours. No; then you will only look back, and you will be no longer pure of heart, as you are now. Tell me: am I not right?"

A flush went over her face. He was half-leaning, half-kneeling by her; his eyes watched her with a dreamy pleasure in them, half-sensual, half-spiritual.

He was utterly in earnest as he spoke; he meant truly what he uttered; but he was a master in the power of casting sweet trouble into a woman's soul, and there

was an added pleasure to him when the soul was deep and calm like a lake and his was the first hand to drop either a pearl or a stone into its depths.

"Am I not right?" he murmured softly.

She pushed her hair back from her forehead a little wearily and with a sense of confusion.

"Yes—oh, yes," she answered him, "I suppose a woman's life without love is incomplete. I suppose I only sleep; but I can care for no one—in that way. Art alone moves me."

He had risen as he had spoken last; and now, bending downward with exquisite grace, he touched her hand with his lips as softly as a bird's wing might brush a rose in passing.

"Happy he for whom you shall awake," he murmured as he stooped.

Then he glanced at the clock, bowed low, caressed the dog, and went.

The clock-hands stood at eleven.

Etoile sat without moving as he had left her gazing into the fire. A nameless emotion stirred within her and made her pulse thrill. A troubled pain, that yet was not pain at all, was on her. "What have I missed?" she wondered; and then her face grew warm again, and she rose with a restless impatience of herself, not understanding what ailed her.

Meanwhile Ioris passed out into the moonlit night, which was cold and wet, flinging his furs about him in the teeth of the north wind, and, with the geranium flower hidden in his breast, mounted the staircase of the Casa Challoner.

At the Casa Challoner the dinner had been gay, but Lady Joan had been gloomy.

In vain did Victor Louche tell his best stories, and

Madame Pâtauge cap them with still better; in vain did both of them sing the funniest and naughtiest songs that theatres and *cafés-chantant* had ever rung with; in vain did they disport themselves and earn their truffles and their wine and their entrance into the Temple of all the Virtues—in vain: the brow of the Lady Joan was dark, her high spirits had departed, and her eyes were as two scimitars flushing ominously in moonlight.

Victor Louche, innocent or malicious, called out from the piano at eleven o'clock, "Ah, *pardieu!* where is Prince Io? I thought I missed something familiar from the *menu.*"

The cheery Pâtauge from a capacious chair sent out a cone of tobacco-smoke.

"Ah, yes, where is Prince Charming? It seemed to me there was something wanting. You have never quarrelled with him, *ma mie?* He is too delightful. Such manners! Ah!"

"Quarrel!" said the Lady scornfully. "Who *could* quarrel with Io? Quarrel with a beanstalk! That's more character than he has."

"Jealous: who of, I wonder?" thought the astute Victor, with a crash of the chords.

Mr. Challoner was, as usual, in his own sanctum, with the *Times* and the Share-list.

Madame Pâtauge looked across at Monsieur Ronsoulet and winked; but the wink was lost on him: he was thinking of his statue of Palestrina for the new Opera-house, and a little of the *chateaubriand* at dinner. He roused himself slowly to what they were talking about.

"To be sure, where is Ioris?" he muttered. "I never dined here without him before. And there is no one in Europe with a truer or more delicate instinct for the arts. Where is he?"

"I expected him to dinner," said Lady Joan sulkily. When she was out of temper she sometimes told the truth.

The Turkish curtains were at that moment put aside, and through the doorway Ioris entered, kissed Madame Pâtauge's hands with gay gallantry, saluted Ronsoulet with reverential friendship, and accosted Victor Louche with a graceful compliment on his last comedy.

"Such perfect manners, *ma mie*. You will never change for the better," said Madame Pâtauge in a low tone to her hostess, who, however, did not even hear, but said roughly and curtly to the offender:

"Where have you been?"

"I have dined at home. I found a mass of correspondence."

"I told you to go with the Stairs."

"I accompanied those amiable sisters."

"Well, why didn't you come straight back here?"

"I remembered orders I had to give Giannino at home. I knew you could not miss me—you would be too well amused."

"You've been writing all the evening?"

"Yes."

The eyes of Ioris began to grow a little angry under their long lashes. Victor Louche, who feared a scene, began to sing "*Ça me chatouille dans le nez*."

Madame Pâtauge nudged her hostess.

"Perhaps he has been playing at the club, and lost money?"

"Io never plays," said the Lady Joan savagely.

There was an awkward silence.

Victor Louche sang very loud and made a great noise with the pedals. Ioris crossed over to M. Ronsoulet.

"*Caro maestro*, how goes the Palestrina?"

"The beanstalk won't bend for ever," thought Madame Pâtauge in her capacious chair.

Fortunately for the preservation of peace there then entered Mimo and Trillo and a youth of three-and-twenty, Guido Serravalle, who sang a fine second to her favourite ritornello.

Trillo brought her word of an Inspecteur des Beaux-Arts who was coming from Petersburg and would buy a great deal; Mimo of an order that Lord Norwich had given him to find an altar-screen, *trecento*, if possible; and Guido Serravalle brought her a new song and an old lute, inlaid with ivory and silver, as a present. They sufficed to avert the thunders of her wrath; but, even as she hastily reckoned that the lute was certainly worth three or four hundred francs and smiled on the donor, her brow was still dark and her face was still sullen.

The sagacious Madame Pâtauge, from her chair blowing clouds of cigarette smoke about her head, watched and winked once more to the slumbering Ronsoulet.

"She is jealous, and he is not. No, he does not even resent that lute; he is only glad that the lute spares him a scene. Ah! there is a storm in the air. I should like to see it break."

But the sagacious Pâtauge had not that pleasure—Ioris did not wait for it.

He left the house with Victor Louche, and left the old ivory lute on his mistress's knee, and Guido Serravalle kneeling before her to tune it, with Mimo and Trillo on either side of her, like her tutelary twin deities as they were.

"Ronsoulet," said Madame Pâtauge as they went home, "that will not last very long."

"Will it not, my dear?" said Ronsoulet; and he

sighed, for experience had taught him that liberty was hard to obtain.

The next morning, while the day was still young, Ioris, in his own little room, taking his coffee, was confronted by an imperious and furious woman. A scene was his fate.

What did he mean? How dared he? Where had he been? What could he say?

The whirlwind broke over his head. The fierce grey eyes flashed like steel. The storm had lost nothing of its violence by having been pent up till noon.

Irritated, annoyed, deafened, surprised, exasperated, he sought refuge in an untruth: he affected jealousy of the old ivory lute.

It was a lie, but it imposed on her. It calmed the troubled waters of her soul. She believed; and believing, consented to be pacified.

So blinded by her credulous vanity was she that she omitted to notice that all the while he never told her where his evening had been spent.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"HE was jealous of poor little Guido!" thought Lady Joan, with a flash of delight and amusement, an hour after the tempest, as she glanced in the mirror to see if her brow were smooth again and her dress uncrumpled, and hastened from the house of Ioris.

On the threshold, with whom should an unkind fate bring her sharply in contact but Lord and Lady Norwich, ponderous and solemn, their footman behind them, walking feebly down the street to their carriage! They had

been to see a neighbouring church which boasted a famous fresco.

Lord and Lady Norwich looked a little stiff; Lady Joan for the moment a little blank. But it was just one of those moments which, like the meetings at the Paris cafés when without her bib-and tucker, tested her *savoir-faire*, and never found her wanting.

"Oh, dear Lady Norwich," she cried with rapture, "what a fortunate moment to meet you! This is Io's house. You know Io's house? Mr. Challoner brought you the other day to see his tapestries, didn't he? (Lord and Lady Norwich, still stiffly, assented.) How I do wish you would come in again now! Will you come in again now? I've just been to see such a lovely old Francia he has found out right away in the mountains. It belongs to a poor old priest, a vicar of a miserable village, who is really almost starving, and never knew the worth of it till Io told him. Mr. Challoner and I have been enchanted with the picture. I'm afraid Robert's just gone, and Io was already out, but I could show you this Francia if you would not mind coming up stairs. You know I do as I like here. Poor dear Io! he's just like my brother. Could you spare me five minutes?"

Lord and Lady Norwich were thawing: they hesitated, mumbled that it was cold, but finally yielded; she was so solicitous and so deferential that they consented to enter the house and to carry their venerable persons and their unimpeachable respectability and dignity up the staircase to see the Francia, which was placed alone in its glory on an old oak easel in one of the entrance-chambers.

"Very fine; really very fine," said Lord Norwich, and sat down before it.

The Francia was a real Francia; it had been in the

family of Ioris for as many centuries as have gone by since the tender old painter looked with wet eyes on Raffaele's panel that made him ashamed of the labours of his own long lifetime. There was no doubt about the Francia, which was a treasure and favourite with Ioris; and the slow, torpid heart of Lord Norwich began to quicken with longing for it.

"Wasted in a village presbytery—dear me! dear me!" he said, and shook his head. He was an honourable man; he said straight out that he would give the needy priest the just price for it, and named a large sum.

"I'm sure Io can get it for you for that," said the Lady Joan. "I'm so sorry Io's not home now. He was already gone out when I came in first. But I'll tell him, and let you know this evening for certain."

"Perhaps he may wish to buy it himself?" said Lord Norwich—a scrupulous man, very delicate and hesitating under his pomposity.

Lady Joan laughed.

"Poor dear Io! *Buy* it! He'll have to sell his own pictures more likely, I'm afraid. You know he's so poor, though we try to keep things straight for him in the country. No, he let it hang here on the chance of finding a purchaser for the poor old *vicario*. He'll be so delighted you have seen and fancied it. Io loves to do good. Dear Lady Norwich, are you cold on this marble floor?"

Lady Norwich began to think the rooms were cold: if Lord Norwich had seen enough of the picture she wished to go. This was precisely what Lady Joan wanted her to do. She was afraid every moment that Ioris would come out of his own little room, and she had no means of signalling to him to stay there shut up; and though of course she could readily have explained his

appearance on some hypothesis or another, still it was better to avoid it. So she suggested that the apartment was cold.

"Io is so little at home, you know; he is so much with us," she said frankly.

"As if she *would* say that, if there were anything between them!" thought Lady Norwich, and commented on the speech to this effect afterwards to her friends. So Lady Joan piloted them in safety down stairs, and was offered a seat in their carriage, and took it, and drove home to luncheon with these great and excellent people; and having begun the morning with a scene, ended it with a success, like the truly clever woman she was.

"Not like to sell the Francia, Io!" she screamed later in the day. "But you must sell it—you shall sell it. If I hadn't sold it I should have been compromised for life. Would you dare to compromise *me* by telling these old asses the picture is yours?"

A gentleman cannot compromise a woman, even if she has just made him a stormy scene in an unmasked visit to his own house. So Ioris, with an impatient and embittered heart, saw his Francia transferred to the Norwich collection.

The purchase-money was a large sum indeed.

"It will set your poor priest at ease for his life, I hope," said the kindly stupid purchaser, who liked to think people were comfortable through his means.

Ioris bowed in silence.

There was no poor priest to have the purchase-money; but the Lady Joan shortly afterwards bought herself a *rivière* of emeralds that was going cheap, and, from the Chemnitz sales, an old cabinet of the first matchless Boule.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE gardens of the Colonna Palace are amongst the most charming things of Rome. When the iron gate clangs behind you and you climb the ilex-walk to them you will ten to one be all alone. The gardens are just such gardens as Horace and Virgil used to move in; you sit under the shattered pine planted to mark Rienzi's death, and all the temples and towers of the immortal city lie beneath, and the pile of the Capitol soars upward near you, from the mass of roofs, like a cliff from out the sea; the pigeons pace to and fro, the ducks push their flat beaks amongst the grass, swallows skim by, oranges drop, the sound of the many trickling streams and fountains blends with the subdued murmur of the streets far down below. The world holds few sweeter or nobler places to dream in than these gardens of Rienzi's foes.

Etoile found them out, and often went across the piazza to them in the early morning or at the decline of day, with the great dog Tsar.

One afternoon, having passed all the morning in the Vatican galleries with Princess Vera, she entered the gardens to sit and watch the sun sink to his setting. As she sat there, with volumes of Giusti and of Leopardi on her lap, at which she had not even looked, Tsar rose and moved his tail in animated welcome. She glanced downward through the shelving descent of ilex and orange leaves, and saw coming across from the palace by the little bridge that crosses the street the figure of Ioris.

Tsar ran headlong down the winding walks and steps to meet him. He came up, caressing the dog, and approached her with uncovered head.

"I saw you from the gallery of the palace; I could not resist ascending. I saw you were looking more at Rome than at your books. You love my city?"

"Ah, what a commonplace! That is only to say that I am not quite soulless."

"Few care for Rome as you do."

"No? To be sure Lady Joan says that it is as dirty as Cairo, as dear as Trouville, as ugly as Brighton, and as great an imposture as Athens. Tastes differ."

He gave an impatient gesture.

"Why must you always speak of *her*? Let me forget that she exists for a moment."

Etoile looked at him a moment, then looked away.

"Do not say those things to me. They are not loyal."

"Loyal! Do slaves give loyalty? You have called me a slave."

She was silent.

"Can loyalty be enforced by cudgels and chains? She thinks it can, but it cannot."

"Tell her so, then: not me."

Ioris sighed impatiently.

"Tell her! How little you know her!" he muttered. He thought of the fierce storms, the violent reproaches, the tempestuous outbursts which avenged the slightest opposition to his tyrant's will.

All that men most dread, and which they have concentrated in the one all-eloquent word a "scene," she could pour out upon his head in any fatal hour that her whim was crossed or wrath excited.

A woman's violence is a mighty power; before it, reason recoils unnerved, justice quails appalled, and peace perishes like a burnt-up scroll; it is a sand-storm, before which courage can do but little: the bravest man can but fall on his face and let it rage on above him.

He walked to and fro, a moment or two, on the level path of the upper terrace; then very wearily rested his elbows on the wall and leaned there near her where she sat.

It was a beautiful afternoon; the sun was still above the dusky lines of the pines of Monte Mario, far away in front, and the warm light tinted the soft, clear olive of his cheek and the delicate, proud outlines of his face.

His face and figure lent themselves to the beauty of any scene. Standing on a reaped field, against the bare poles of the maize, in his white linen dress, with the warm sun about him, he had a poetic, supple, picturesque grace that Leopold Robert would have loved to perpetuate in a Roman sketch; standing in a crowded presence-chamber, with orders hanging to his coat and a sea of court ladies, laces, and feathers, and diamonds about him, in the waxlight, he had a grave, meditative dignity of beauty that Vandyke would have liked to render in a portrait which should have all the lordly sadness of his Charles Stuart in it.

With Ioris all this was quite unconscious: hence its charm. Nature had made him so; that was all. But his personal graces gave him an irresistible sway over women. This kind of power to charm is like a magician's gift.

Women shall honour great ability, shall behold true manliness, shall be worshipped with knightly reverence, shall be assailed by all the splendour of intellect, shall be wooed with all daring and all humility, and yet shall remain cold, and as untouched, as marble in the quarry. And then there shall come one who has this magic gift—this wand that wakes the sleeping senses, this rose that slipped into the bosom, banishes all peace, this power of love incarnated,—and though the magician be faithless

as the wind, and rootless as the windborn flower yet, in him alone for ever shall be her heaven and her hell.

"What a life is mine!" he said impetuously now, after a long silence. "The life of a lackey? You described it well that day at Fiordelisa. No will of my own; no time of my own; ordered here, ordered there; dragging through the same endless and joyless routine. The lackey has more liberty than I, for he at least stipulates for some few hours of freedom. What future can I look forward to? I dare not look forward; a dead blank faces me—faces me everywhere. With no home, with no interest, with no children, with no hope, is it worth while living? At times I envy the very mules that creep past me with their load: they are less sensible of the weight they bear than I am."

Etoile looked at him and felt a pang at her own heart: half of pity, half of pain. She could not doubt the sincerity of this passionate lament.

"But your friendship——" she murmured, and then paused, with the colour in her face.

It was not friendship that thus dragged upon his life. She felt ashamed to speak the sorry lie Society allows and loves.

Ioris, with one of his swift changes of mood, and uneasily conscious that he had betrayed himself too far, turned and laughed carelessly.

"Friendship! Ah! yes. Friendship means anything—everything—from deadliest hate and hottest love downward to the zero of complete indifference! (There is only Tsar, I think, who really gives one the honest friendship of a bygone day.)"

He drew the dog to him and caressed him, and sank down on the bench beside her, and talked of Leopardi, whom he had known when he himself had been a little child, and together they watched the pile of the Capitol

grow dark and the sun descend behind the purples of the pines; together they left the gardens, that grew drear and cold when once the sun had set, and passed across the square in the fleeting twilight.

At her door he bade her adieu, and with a heavy heart and a reluctant step went slowly back to the house which stood to him in the stead of home—a bastard home, warmed with the dull fires of a worn-out passion; he felt a great reluctance to enter, an utter weariness of all he would encounter.

Day after day, night after night, the comedy was always the same. The curt command, the hard contempt, the commercial discussion, the sensual gaze, the trite caress, the hollow ecstasy—he knew them all, one after another, so well—so horribly well. His heart failed him as he mounted the long stone staircase and entered the familiar atmosphere, haunted with stale smoke and stirred by the twang of the mandoline.

He hated the scent; he hated the sounds. They were all fraught to him with the sickliness of an enforced habit, of a perpetual repetition. Shining eyes flashing through tobacco-mist over a ribboned guitar may be intoxicating for six hours, six weeks, even six months. But for six years!

In six years the laugh palls, the songs jar, the eyes repel.

A sense of dulness and jaded effort fell on him always now whenever he crossed the threshold of that too terribly well-known room. The deadly apathy of a familiarity that is not hallowed by any sense of sanctity or sweetness fell on him heavy as lead whenever he entered her dwelling. He knew all that would be said and done, all that would be expected and exacted; it had no more interest for him than a comedy that has run three hundred nights has for the stall-keepers.

A woman need never dread the fiercest quarrel with her lover; the tempest may bring sweeter weather than any it broke up, and after the thunder the singing of birds will sound lovelier than before. Anger will not extinguish love, nor will scorn trample it dead; jealousy will fan its fires, and offences against it may but fasten closer its fetters that it adores beyond all liberty. But when love dies of a worn-out familiarity it perishes for ever and aye.

Jaded, disenchanted, wearied, indifferent, the tired passion expires of sheer listlessness and contemptuous disillusion.

The death is slow and unperceived, but it is sure; and it is a death that has no resurrection.

This was how the passion which the Lady Joan desired to cudgel into immortality, was dying now.

When he entered the Turkish room this afternoon he found her the centre of an adoring circle of half a dozen youths, with the white-haired Silverly Bell and the very dear old Mimo as more solid ballast. She was surrounded by sketches of costumes, Eastern stuffs, strings of sequins, and damascened weapons, and was discussing her own and her companions' attire at a fancy ball to be given by the Echéances.

"How late you are, Io! Where have you been all this time?" she said in greeting, a heavy frown upon her brows.

"With the King of Denmark," answered Ioris.

"*What?* Why, Almeria's in attendance on him."

"Almeria is indisposed. They sent for me."

Lady Joan looked at him sharply. She had a vague suspicion that there was something withheld from her.

"Where did the king go?" she pursued, being possessed with the common feminine belief that catechisms produce truth as their results.

"To the galleries," answered Ioris.

"Will he buy while he's here?" said the Lady Joan, her thoughts reverting to business and her eyes to Burletta.

Ioris shrugged his shoulders.

"I really cannot say."

Then he took up the day's *Fanfulla* and sat down near the window, whilst she returned to her costumes and her courtiers, and put on her yashmaks and rattled her tambourines, and screamed at the youths' jokes and smiled on their homage, and petted her dear old friends Silverly and Mimo so cleverly that neither was envious of the other.

"How different it is with her!" he mused, with a sigh, to himself.

Etoile had become "her" in his thoughts.

"You're as grave as an owl, Io," cried the Lady Joan, snapping her fingers in his face as six o'clock sounded, and she dismissed her slaves, and threw the windows open to let the cigar smoke out, since the Dean of St. Edmund's and the Lady Barbara, his wife, were going to dine with her, and other eminent respectabilities were to meet them; and her well-trained servant was already clearing away the French songs, and the cigar-ash, and the costumes, and the tambourines, and laying out in their stead grave English journals and reports of Academies of Art and Science.

She was careful to give many dinners, and good ones. She knew that money laid out on plovers' eggs and truffles, green peas in winter, and salmon from the North, sherries from the Xeres plains, and clarets from the Garonne's banks, will bring forth high interest in the shape of much long-suffering from a propitiated, and by consequence pardoning, Society.

She had never read the *Satyricon*, and perhaps never heard of it, but she acted on the principle inculcated by the priestess Ænothea. In this age, as in that, two broad gold pieces, provided they be big enough, will buy the right to kill the sacred goose of the temple and even to cook it too.

The world is like aged Ænothea.

"Slay the divine bird! oh, vilest sinner!" she cried, and banged her trencher down in ruthless rain of blows; but, softening at the sight of a well-filled hand, she relented. "Nay, sweet youth, it was but in love and fear for thee I scolded. Nay, I promise thee, surely it shall be known to none. And since the bird is dead it were of no avail to avenge it; I will strip it in thine honour, and we will make merry over its baked meats!"

Society has not changed much since the *Satyricon*. It has invented prettier names for the old vices—that is all.

Ioris now moved from her touch with that petulance which took in him the charm of a woman's grace and a woman's waywardness.

"*Carissima mia!* One does not feel flattered when you take such ardent interest in young lads of twenty that can warble a café ballad; and, as you only reproach me when I come here, and amuse yourself with others, why should I endeavour to be anything but grave?"

She did not know the secret of the impatience which moved him, the comparison with the thoughts and ways of another woman that he instituted to her own loss in his own meditations. She believed that he was angered at her attention to the young men, as he had been angry at the ivory lute, and such anger argued jealousy and jealousy had been very quiet in him for some years. She was delighted at its revival.

"What a goose you are! Go home and dress," she cried gaily to him as she disappeared into her own chamber. He caught her hand and detained her a moment.

"Who dines with you to-night? I forget."

"Oh, a heap of great people. Bores of the first water. Just the folks that always make me want to dance the Cancan in their faces, and make the seventh heaven of Mr. Challoner."

"You have not asked,—the Comtesse d'Avesnes?"

"Etoile! My dear Io! Are you mad? What, ask a Paris Sappho to meet the Dean of St. Edmund's and the Countess of Norwich! When will you understand the decorum of the inviolate isle of fogs and fogies?"

And the Lady Joan went into her dressing-room with a laugh and shut the door, to glance over the London reviews on the Dean's learned study of the "Use and Import of the Letter Koph."

Ioris went out, and down the stairs thoughtfully. He was not at ease; he felt as if he had heard a blasphemy, and had let it pass, unrebuked, out of cowardice.

Lady Joan, her study of the Letter Koph completed, went to her toilette in a contented and radiant mood, and had her velvet dress put on, and ran a gilt spadella through her dark braids, and clasped a gilt waist-belt round her, and saw that she looked very well.

"He was actually jealous of those nice boys! What fun it is! Poor Io!" she thought to herself with that complacent pity for the sufferer from her own fascinations which is the greatest enjoyment of a very vain woman.

She was enraptured to think that the old folly was in him still, and she was in happy ignorance of the workings of his thoughts.

He was jealous! She smiled at herself in the glass

with perfect satisfaction. After six years he was still jealous!

He was jealous—poor Io!

Lady Joan smiled at herself, thinking of Abana and Pharphar, Orontes and Euphrates; and so in perfect good humour went into her drawing-room, to form a domestic picture on the hearthrug with her husband and child, by the time that Lord and Lady Norwich and the Dean of St. Edmund's and his wife entered, coming all together from the Hôtel des Îles Britanniques.

She was on such good terms with herself that she behaved with admirable composure throughout five hours of dreary and dignified platitudes, and enraptured the Dean with her sound views of the dangers of Christianity from the Greek Church, and thanked Lady Barbara with effusion for a promised recipe for knitting children's woollen stockings.

"We have only one treasure, you know," said Lady Joan, with her warmest smile, "and I like to fancy she wears anything of my own making when I can!"

"Such a natural sentiment!" rejoined the Dean's wife, quite touched. She had left sons and daughters of all ages in the monastic shades of St. Edmund's, and worshipped them.

"What an excellent young woman that is, my dear!" said Lady Barbara to the Dean as they drove home to their hotel. "And such a devoted mother too, evidently."

"A vastly agreeable woman," murmured the Dean, in tones as soft and thick as the *tête de crème* he had been drinking. "Good common sense in her—no superficiality—her remarks about my pamphlet were really astonishingly clever. Quite a deep knowledge for a woman. A very bad marriage she made; a very bad marriage. I remember wondering at it at the time. But it seems to

have turned out remarkably well—house nicely appointed—nice dinner—that sturgeon was particularly well done.”

“And Mr. Challoner such a good creature.”

“Sensible man; something in the East, wasn’t he? Consul—carpets—something that began with a C, I know. Asked me to go with him to see a Gentile da Fabriano that is to be had as a wonderful bargain.”

“Oh, yes, she told me about it. It belongs to that striking-looking man that sat quite silent at dinner, an Italian, a great friend of theirs; he’d been with the King of Denmark all day; and I fancy he’s very poor by what she said—that it would be a charity.”

“Ah! the Italians always are as poor as church rats. Certainly, let us go and see it. I always admire Gentile and all that school of Early Upper Italy. They are very kind people evidently—excellent people.”

So the Dean of St. Edmund’s droned himself into a doze, and was ready whenever he should go back to his cloister to vow in society everywhere that by all his clerical dignity Joan Challoner was the most estimable of her sex; and his wife was ready to second him.

Thus just by reading about the letter Koph for ten minutes, and by begging a recipe to knit woollen stockings, she secured champions in the Church of England, and sold a picture next day at a net profit of three hundred pounds.

“Have I a soul?” said Voltaire’s peacock. “Certainly I have: look at my tail.”

Lady Joan would have said, “Certainly I have: look at my card-basket and my bargains.”

“You were very stupid to-night, Io,” she said roughly when the Dean and his lady were fairly away and Ioris remained alone with her, with the lamps burning low.

"You were very stupid to-night," she said, giving a twist to the silver-gilt spilla in her coiled hair.

"I have a headache, *carissima mia*."

Lady Joan looked dubiously at him.

"You're always having headaches now."

"And you do not pity me?"

"I wish you wouldn't always have 'em just when *my* friends dine here," she said ungraciously. "You're always well enough when that woman's here."

"What woman?"

"As if you didn't know! You're twice as civil to her as you need be. Marjory's noticed it, I can tell you. Oh, don't look so innocent. You're always after Etoile. You know you are."

"*Mais, ma chère!* You always see me courteous, I hope, to all your sex."

"All my fiddlesticks! Courteous indeed! You're much more than courteous—talking to her all night, going away when she goes away, sitting staring at her as if she were something new-fallen from heaven."

"*Mais, ma chère!* What exaggeration! I told you the first night we saw her that she did not even please me; that she was insolent, and was cold—she is lost in her art—she does not perceive that such mere mortals as myself exist."

"You try to show her you exist, at any rate. Marjory saw you walking with her this very day in the Colonna gardens."

"*La bonne* Marjory must want to make mischief. I came up from calling on Marc' Antonio by the gardens to make a short cut, and she was there—it was the purest accident."

"Humph!" Lady Joan was a woman of experience, and did not believe in accidents between men and women.

"Do not let us quarrel about nothing," he said, rousing himself and altering the twist of the gilded spilla. "She is no woman to me. If I look at her at all it is merely as one would look at old Grillparzer at Vienna, or Wagner at Baireuth—for the sake of what she has done. When a woman has entered a public arena she is half-unsexed. You know what I think of notoriety for your sex."

His heart smote him as he spoke, as though he uttered a blasphemy against the saints of his childish faith. But he did speak with an admirable carelessness and contempt combined which carried conviction to his hearer's ear.

Lady Joan liked to be persuaded that she had voluntarily abstained from being a celebrity, as Richelieu liked to be persuaded that he had voluntarily abstained from being a poet. Besides, she was always easily lulled into complacent serenity. A very vain woman is easily deceived, because it seems impossible to her that anyone can ever be preferred to herself.

He played with the spilla in her hair and leaned over her in the mellow lamplight. She looked up into his amorous eyes, and was content; the lustre in them was dim to what she had once seen there and the fire spent, yet he knew how to make their dreamy depths tell the tale she had heard ten thousand times and never tired of; it was only acting now, but it was acting so perfect that she lived its dupe in happy blindness. Keen, and shrewd, and hard of temper though she was, here she was duped as utterly as the softest and silliest of her sex.

Though very clever in many ways, one thing in her was stronger than her cleverness, and that was vanity.

A very trustful woman believes in her lover's fidelity

with her heart; a very vain woman believes in it with her head.

To Lady Joan it would have seemed more possible for the stars to fall from the sky than for any man to desert her.

In passion for him she was as reasonless and as sightless as any Juliet or Gretchen lying for the first moment in her lover's arms. The years had blown low the flame in him, but in her they had only fanned it to a fiercer strength. The ridicule of him, the command of him, the oppression and the tyranny and the suspicion of him, were only her way of showing power, only her device for making her world believe the thing she wished. Alone with him, love intoxicated, drugged, subdued her; alone with him, she was only an eager, passionate, voluptuous mistress; alone with him, she was only Cleopatra—the Dame du Comptoir was dead.

Ioris was in everything the superior of his tyrant.

In intelligence, in taste, in culture, in disposition he was alike far beyond her. Yet, by a coarse, rough energy which swept before it his hesitating temperament, and by a sensual, fierce passion which his soft nature recoiled from conflict with, she had obtained a dominion over him which he had ceased even to think of contesting. The women who love men truly never obtain this power: they love too well to watch the occasion to seize it. The old proverb that, between two, one is always booted and spurred, the other always saddled and bridled, is as true as proverbs always are, which are "the distilled drops of the experience of nations." It is not superiority of mind, or of character, or of person that determines which shall ride and which shall be ridden; it is generally rather the result of a certain hardness of temper which determines the question early in the day

and never loses the supremacy. Taken roughly it may be safely predicted that it will always be the highest nature which will submit. Often it is the jade that rules the hero, the fool that has feet kissed by the genius.

The very fierceness and force and fire of this woman, which had at first intoxicated him, served now at once to repel and to intimidate him.

From the stern eyes, from the imperious voice, from the vigorous gestures, from the resolute will that had once fascinated him by their sheer strength which swept his softer nature away on it as a mountain torrent sweeps a tree, he had little by little grown to recoil in the inevitable reaction of all purely animal passion. Her heel was set on his throat. Once he had kissed the foot that so degraded him. But little by little he had begun to breathe labouredly under its oppression. Little by little the desire to raise it and rise had come to him. He was tired of his life.

Tired of the order and counter-orders, of the buying and selling, of the petty hypocrisies, of the puerile aims, of the exactions that compelled him to follow like her shadow her path through society, of the obligation to show himself wheresoever she might choose to go in that continual attendance which is a rapture when voluntary from passion, a deathly fatigue when imposed from habit—he was like a prisoner who drags a cannon-ball at his ankle.

Night after night, as he dressed to go through the social comedy whose every speech and gesture he knew beforehand, he sighed, impatient to be free; and yet he went. Habit is an ever-lengthening chain whose links get heavier with each added ring.

With her their love was still alive, an ever-burning

fire, irresistible and insatiable in its hours of abandonment. With him their love was dead and was replaced by habit.

It is a terrible difference.

Letting himself out of her house in the cold rosy dawn he shuddered, not with the physical chill of the wintry night, but at the vision of his own future.

"This woman always!"

So he thought every morning, yet every night he went back to her, as the mill-horse to its yoke. She was not faithful to him, because such women as she know not fidelity. She was not truthful to him, because truth was not in her and could not find its home in her mouth. She was the ruin of his life, whilst she declared herself his salvation. Her tyranny, her exactions, her ridicule, and her overwhelming egotism cast into the cold shade of men's scorn the man whom she delighted to oppress and wound, as a child loves to hurt the pet that it hugs to its bosom. His idiosyncrasies were lost under her inordinate vanities, and her obtrusive personalities drove him to the refuge of silence and self-repression. He passed his life like a tree under the shadow of a high wall: only the wall had been built up brick and brick, so that he had never noticed it till it was for ever there between him and the sun.

She herself was in love still—with that terrible and untiring passion which can exist in a woman who to masculine vigour unites feminine caprice.

She delighted to make him subservient, to render him absurd, to deny him any will of his own, to ridicule his words, to mock at him before the world. But this was the result only of her natural temper. It was only as she beat a dog, or punished a child, or tyrannised over whatever lay at her mercy. Besides, she thought

that it imposed on her society; she thought that it veiled her own passion for him, which was strong and fierce and keen; which begrudged a glance or a smile from him elsewhere; which took a voluptuous delight in his person, in his touch. But in his presence, in his regard, in his caress, there was still intoxication for her; she would have seen him dead sooner than given to another; her passion was violent, faithless, cruel, ignoble, but it was passion, and it was living still; a restless sea of fire that beat itself upon the cold ashes of his own dead desires till it warmed them to a semblance of itself.

Once he had felt as tiger-tamers feel, and the very danger that there was in the creature he caressed had served to enthrall him. Little by little the reality of the tigress temper had become visible to him, and its greed and hardness and predatory instincts were revealed. This queen of the desert that laid her soft cheek against his was, after all, only a cat that growled. Little by little the sense stole on him that his arms held what preyed on him—and would devour him.

But when he awoke to his own peril it was too late—the tamed tigress had sprung and mastered him.

CHAPTER XX.

CLEOPATRA after sunset, the Lady Joan rose nevertheless every morning Dame du Comptoir to the tips of her fingers. Eventide might be for the mandoline or the mask, and the tender passions and the fierce ones, but noonday was none the less for business.

Her forenoons were sternly given to those commercial considerations for which she had brought a leaning from the banks of Abana and Pharphar, Orontes and Euphrates. Telegrams and letters about her various speculations and gigantic commercial transactions scarcely let her swallow her breakfast in comfort; and these attended to, there were the teacups and tryptychs, the pots and the pans of her excellent friends and brothers Mimo and Trillo; china to be packed, canvases to be backed, and all the minutiae to be attended to of that sublime mission of the diffusion of Art which she had set herself as her object in life, only secondary to the Berkshire pigs and the Brahma poultry, and the general salvation of Fiordelisa.

Mimo and Trillo were the very Dioscuri of Art; twin Tyndarids of connoisseurship and commerce; Gemini of genius who were both unspeakably dear to her; though plump Mimo bore off the palm as far as being petted by her went, and was by far the most enthusiastic in her praises. According to him she was angelic, heroic, un-

equalled, far above all the mortal weaknesses of her sex, and only possessing one little, little, little fault—that of being so unnaturally and superhumanly perfect that she was incapable of conceiving that a base-minded world could ever put incorrect constructions on her noble actions.

“Poverina! Certainly she compromises herself; alas! she does compromise herself; but it is only the boldness of innocence!” said Mimo, with a bit of cracked Limoges in his hand and a big cigar in his mouth.

“It was the boldness of innocence.” It cost the good fellow no more to say so than it did to say that any one of his round plates, painted and baked by a living workman in a cellar in the Trastevere, was pure Gubbio ware, with the iridescent hues coloured by Maestro Giorgio himself.

“It was the boldness of innocence.”

The phrase tickled the fancy of Mimo very much, and was for ever ready on his tongue, as “*Antico—proprio antico!*” was for ever on it before any doubtful plaque of *repoussé* work or any *quattrocentista* bridal coffer that had been carved and gilded the week before. “It was the boldness of innocence.” After all, if the phrase pleased her so much, it cost him very little to say it; and what mortal man would not learn it by heart, when, just for saying it, you get a cosy sofa to lounge in, and a nice little dinner to eat, and a handsome woman to pet you?

Besides, “the boldness of innocence” is like the reputation for oddity—once accorded, it is as elastic as indiarubber and as comprehensive as the umbrellas of the kings of the East, which would shelter three hundred men. There is nothing you cannot explain away with it;

before it Juvenal himself would be obliged to make his bow and retire quite satisfied.

Trillo was somewhat more austere, and had not the comfortable roundness as of a child's tumbler or an Indian god which characterised Mimo; he was also more astute, and could never be brought to rhapsodise as Mimo would do over the Berkshire pigs and the Minerva who had imported them. Trillo went in for high art; found marvellous Raffaelles and Luca della Robbias in old cellars and old walls; and though occasionally to oblige he would condescend to furniture, he would never run about and find old chairs for you, as Mimo would do any day of his life. Trillo had only a studio, and never had anything else, whereas Mimo, if you were buying a good deal of him, did not so much mind your calling his chambers a shop. But this unbending austerity of Trillo made him, perhaps, the more useful of the two in the main. Trillo even impressed the great Hebrides family, and found them a stove painted by Hirschvögel when that master stayed and worked in Venice, and an altar-screen in ivory carved by Desidirio, before which all South Kensington subsequently went on its knees. He had been, indeed, so fortunate as to find these exact works of art three years before for Prince Kouramasine, who had borne them off to his castle in White Russia; but White Russia and Ben Nevis are far-sundered; and the designs were so beautiful that it was not extraordinary that both Hirschvögel and Desidirio should have been so enamoured of them as to have executed them twice.

Both Mimo and Trillo, who were men of judgment, suffered many things from the ignorance of their Minerva. She would confuse styles and orders, jumble up schools

and epochs, call Turin Arazzi Gobelin, and Frankenthal china Worcester; attribute a Dutch ivory to Alessandro Algardi, and a post-Renaissance painting to Spinello or Francia; and they would shiver when these mistakes were made before folks that knew, and would groan together in secret.

But these were trifles after all; there were so very few folks that knew; and their Minerva was invaluable to them, and they sat at her feet solemn as the owl of her emblem, whenever the great Scotch cousins came with her, or the much-enduring British tourist was brought in her train. Indeed, in one sense her ignorance was advantageous: it looked so frank.

Indeed, her very blunders became useful.

Trillo would pull his beard and sigh that the dear and noble lady had such wonderful natural intelligence that she had never been brought to correct it by study. She had too much good faith too: she fell a prey to designing persons; and Trillo pulled his beard, and sighed again, and confessed that a good deal the dear and noble lady had in her house was *robaccia*—all sheer *robaccia*! She had been imposed on, she was always imposed on when he and Mimo were not by; she had a few real gems—yes, a few real gems—Mimo and he had secured them for her; but as for the rest——! Now, mutual admiration societies answer well; but mutual depreciation societies answer, perhaps, still better. The former is a gilded, screen that may soon fall to pieces; but the latter is an impenetrable haze, such as hid Jove from mortal eyes profane.

The tried partnership between the Temple of all the Virtues, and Mimo and Trillo had never been signed or

sealed—nay, never even been whispered—but it served its purpose admirably.

When people took tea and a muffin in the Temple they did not see the fine wires connecting it with the shop and the studio; and when they went to the shop and the studio they did not discern the metaphorical telephone by which shop and studio took counsel with the Temple. But nevertheless the impalpable lines were there; and Mimo and Trillo, who were the Owl and the Ægis of Minerva, naturally absorbed much of Minerva's attention, especially when there came any mighty cousins wanting teacups and tryptychs, or an Æsthetic Dean or a Ritualistic Rector with a pretty taste in the way of carved choir-seats or ornamented vestments.

So that in one way or another she was always very busy.

That practical half of her temperament which Voightel had called the *dame du comptoir* was filled with a multiplicity of objects and interests, from new people to conciliate to old china to sell, from bargains to be disposed of to balls to get invited to, from companies to be floated to visiting cards to be left; and this harassing and multitudinous minutiae of interests so absorbed her at times that she actually forgot to watch Ioris, and left him a certain slender enjoyment of personal liberty of which he was quick to avail himself to the utmost.

Prudence at times required that she should call on people with no escort but Mr. Challoner's; business at times required that she should rummage amidst old lumber shops with Burletta as her guardian and guide; her own pleasure at times required that she should disport herself at theatres or in Campagna rides with Douglas

Græme or young Guido Serravalle. Occasionally, too, there would pass through Rome some old friend of the camping-out days of the Desert, of whom it was not judicious to allow Ioris to see too much, since Ioris had queer fancies, and amongst them was one that she had been a stranger to Eros and Anteros till he met her. Men will have these notions—pure vanity, no doubt—but it is never worth while to disturb them.

So thus—here and there—he gained his morning or evening of freedom; and whenever such a release came to him he hesitated never now as to how he should spend it, but wended his way to the old house by the Rospi-gliosi garden and made friends with Tsar, and sat in the dreamy fragrance of Etoile's narcissi and winter-roses.

Very clever as both the Lady Joan and Marjory Scrope were in their several manners, and experienced as the latter certainly was in masculine ways and wiles, to neither of them did it occur to remember, in their observations of Ioris, two things.

First, that human nature yearns for freedom.

Secondly, that human nature has a tendency towards that which is forbidden.

When they set themselves in their several modes to watch him, and were convinced that they succeeded in learning all his actions, they never took into account that men are like school-children, and cannot by any amount of spying be hindered from wholly following their bent, and will only be driven into devices for concealing it.

The real temper of Ioris, the amorous but reticent, impassioned yet impassive temperament of his nationality had been long lost sight of under the dulling influence of

a galling routine. The semi-conjugal character of his position in the Casa Challoner and at Fiordelisa had long taken all savour of intrigue out of it; it was impossible to cheat himself into thinking he was climbing an *escalier dérobé* when Mr. Challoner welcomed him so blandly up the grand staircase; his life had long lost the supreme charm of life: it had lost all possibility of the unforeseen arriving in it. Rising in the morning he knew all the routine of the coming twenty-four hours as well as he knew the numerals on the clock's face, which would tell them as they passed.

In her intense eagerness to absorb him completely, she had overshot her mark; she had washed out of his life all expectation and all desire. She had made it a mere sand-plain, monotonous and arid, with her own figure looming perpetually in mirage on its horizon, till turn where he would he could see nothing else.

When the charm of a new interest, the mystery of a character he did not comprehend, the attraction of a woman unlike any that he had ever known—when all these fell in his path he gave way to the impulse that moved him to pursue them, with hardly more thought at first than a child has as it runs down a bye-path to see nearer a butterfly on the wing.

“*Vous l'avez voulu!*” he would have said to the woman who had sought to blind his eyes and bind his fancies. She had done it herself: the slave's life into which she had chained him had made the slave's instincts awake in him: the instincts to hide and to escape.

He had fallen into an utterly cheerless routine of existence, to which he was only reconciled by the sort of ferocious seduction that she still possessed for him; but

when the eyes of Etoile first met his they had awakened the dormant romance and the forgotten dreams of his youth.

It became sweet to him to have thoughts that his tyrant could not divine, sympathies that she could not reach, happy hours that she could not mar; and at first he merely concealed the frequency of his visits to Etoile as he concealed every better emotion that he felt from his mistress. As it was she never suspected them.

In the forenoons that she gave to Mimo and Trillo, and to business generally, she seldom ordered or expected his attendance, and most of those forenoons found him by Etoile's hearth, sitting in the fragrance of her heliotropes and hyacinths. When Lady Joan questioned him as to his morning he would say he had been at the Court or the Vatican, at the studios or the stables, and she was content.

To Ioris, who had much of the artist and something of the poet, and who might say, like Camors of his imagination, "*J'en ai, mais je l'étouffe*," there was a pure and fresh pleasure in roaming over Rome with Etoile.

Accustomed for years to a woman who ransacked all art only to get something to buy cheap and sell dear, and who regarded a picture or a bust only with an eye as to what it would fetch in ten years' time, he found a new delight in the culture and fancy of a woman to whom every stone had a story and every statue was a living friend. When he went with Etoile and stood before the Faun of the Capitol he saw that she grew very pale and was quite silent.

"What do you feel?" he asked her.

After a little while she answered him what she did feel and what with her was truth.

"I can hardly tell you. I have thought of all these marbles so long that really to see them seems stranger than a dream. The Faun is the very incarnation of the youth of the world. Three thousand years have passed since he was called to shape, and he smiles as if he had been called out from the white rock but yesterday. Yet so many creeds have changed, and so many empires fallen, and so many cities perished since he saw the light!—the Apollo again, he should not be the god of any art, for all art changes; he is the god of nature, the god eternal, the god of the flowers that grew out of Cæsar's ashes and the sea that smiles though it drowned Shelley, and the sun that shines on while nations perish: —"

Ioris, standing by her, thought of another woman who, coming there for the first time also, had made a wry face at the Apollo and snapped her fingers at him, and called this glory of the Belvidere a moonstruck posture-master, and this Faun of the Capitol a jolly little rogue, but had said she never could see what anybody found in stone dolls to rave about. He had dwelt with the lower and coarser intelligence till he had got used to it, but it had never altogether ceased to jar on him. The finer and more spiritual impulses in him revived and sprung up eagerly to meet the purer atmosphere of Etoile's fancies as pressed-down reeds spring up to meet the breeze.

Meditation and fancy were with her the very sap of life, pervading her from root to branch, as its sap a tree; with him they were but the upmost crown of leaf that fluttered in the wind, and was put forth, or frozen back, according to the air around. Yet there was likeness enough in them to give sympathy, and whilst he was with her he thought and saw and spoke as she did—and was true in it.

He also met Etoile at one or two great houses, embassies, and palaces, where the Lady Joan did not penetrate, and where she permitted him to go, because she always hoped, some day or other, to squeeze herself in by his means.

When his tyrant was near, her boisterous self-assertion completely subdued him; her incessant watchfulness made him constrained; and, annoyed by her persistent claims on his attention, yet afraid to resist them, he had grown into the habit of a silent self-effacement in sheer self-defence.

Away from her he was transformed, and all the grace, talent, and social gifts natural to him had their play. Nature had bestowed on him a graceful and dignified presence, a face that attracted the eyes of all women, and that happy tact and charm of manner which in society outweigh all accomplishment and achievement.

He would have looked well in a panel of Giorgione's or a canvas of Vandyke's, and his grace and bearing went fittingly with these grave old palaces of Rome, where the motley of modern society almost gathers the grace of a dead day by the spell of its surroundings, in the solemn beauty of galleries that Raffaello painted, and the gorgeous vastness of halls that Michael Angelo built.

Etoile had looked at him at first as she would have done at a portrait or a statue; then the portrait smiled, the statue spoke; he lingered beside her in those noble galleries, where the genius of the past gazed down on the frivolity of the present; when she was occupied by others he stood near, mute and listening; when he was there he was her shadow; when he was not there she missed him.

Etoile, from the years when she had pored over

Shakspeare, and Racine, and Goethe in the woodland shadows of her tranquil Ardennes, had no passion save for her art; though it was not likely that the world in general was going to be so simple as to believe this. It is seldom that the world is simple enough to receive a truth. "I am Truth, and have few acquaintances," says the gentleman in Congreve's comedy: when he comes in, most people look the other way.

Etoile in every fibre of her mind and temper was an artist. The artist quite absorbed and extinguished the woman in her. Men thought her—because they found her—cold. They paid her court and wooed her in all kinds of ways, but they all left her unmoved.

Sometimes she would watch two lovers gliding under moonlit trees, or look at a woman with a young child in her arms, and wish that this warmth of human love would touch her. But it did not.

She had many who wooed her, but none who moved her. Sometimes it seemed to her that she was like a high-strung instrument, that echoes all the emotions of the soul but remains itself insensible to them.

She led a life of much isolation by choice, and of much retirement by preference. She considered that to be great the artist must be much alone with himself and with nature, and the leisure she had was given to the arts. When she went into the world it amused her for half an hour; then it grew tedious. She liked better her library, her atelier, her solitude; or the open air, where every breath that blew took her in fancy to the woods and waters of her happy childhood.

"You are an innocent woman, you are a famous woman, but you are not a happy woman," said a great wise man to her once.

"No? I suppose there is always something missing," she answered him.

Meanwhile the world in general knew that she was famous, thought that she was happy, but did not in the least believe her innocent.

To Ioris, as to the world, it seemed strange to find a woman who was still young, and had some place in the great world, passing her time in study and in thought. To come in, with the early morning to her, and see her, with old chronicles and crabbed manuscripts, following the threads of disputed histories or gathering the thoughts of forgotten pasts, had a charm for him. In his youth he had been a student too, and to meet her in her own field he shook off him that worldly levity, and that lower habit of thought which had obscured and absorbed his mind in his later years. It attracted yet it tantalised him to find her pure intellectual abstractions absorb her, whilst the daily pleasures of other women's lives scarce held her for a second. He felt that to make this woman know a human passion would be to draw her down to earth, and break her skyward-bearing wings, and yet he desired to do it—daily desired more and more.

As with him so with a chamois hunter who, seeing a mountain hawk sailing far, far away in the clear rarefied air above the clouds, lifts his rifle, and sends death through the blue serene sacred peace of the still heavens.

The bird drops into a deep abyss where no eyes see its dying agony. It is out of reach, and if reached were of no use to him who shot it, since he only seeks the chamois of the hills that gives him food and shoe-leather. And yet he fires.

And the bird is dead.

Something of the hunter's feeling woke in him now.

She was so far away and so content in that high air where nothing mortal followed. He wanted to bring her down and handle her closer, and feel if her heart beat—make it beat, indeed, by pain, if only pain would do it. Not from cruelty—oh, no. He was never cruel to the lowliest thing that moved. Only from vague curiosity, and a baffled wonder, and an awakening desire; and that eagerness for what is rare and strange, which is as eager in the man with his loves as in the child with his pastimes.

So he came to her constantly in the long mornings of the winter, when the sun grew warm at noon; and went to houses where he could meet her, when he could secure an hour's freedom; and studied her, and grew a little more familiar with her day by day, and learned the details of her life, and told her stories of his own, and gave her that delicate, half-uttered, all-eloquent sympathy which his tact, perhaps, rather than his heart taught him at first; and at times would sit quite silent gazing at her with that mystical, voluptuous, contemplative light in his dreamy gaze which Love has given to the southern and the eastern alone of the sons of men, and which will draw a woman towards it as the sun draws up the dew.

Meanwhile the one who believed she held the key of his thoughts, knew nothing of the truth.

So long as he was always close at hand, to be shown off as a slave, so long as he consented to follow her about and be made absurd at her pleasure; so long as he bought and sold, and fetched and carried for her, and she could call on Io aloud to all the four winds of heaven wheresoever she went, with the display and vanity that were so sweet to her, so long the Lady Joan was not a woman to notice a stifled sigh, a laggard step, a look of

weariness, a gesture of reluctance. These are the signs that women who love well read, trembling, and in themselves droop by as the field-born pimpernel droops by the darker passing of a summer rain-cloud. But she was not one of these. Her vanity bore her buoyant against all perception of such changes. He was her servant, her worshipper, her lover, her plaything—what more could he want of heaven or of earth?

So long as she enchained his person it never occurred to her that his mind, and his heart, and his soul might be elsewhere.

Now and then a thrill of savage jealousy ran through her, wakened by some word of Marjory Scrope's or some sight of Etoile; but it was soon lulled by a careless laugh or a contemptuous denial from Ioris.

She was duped where a less vain and less arrogant temper would have been instantly alarmed.

Meanwhile oppression had its usual result, and produced as its fruit deception.

Ioris was of a frank and tender nature, but he had lived much amongst women, and they had made him false.

The untruthfulness of women communicates itself to the man whose chief society they form, and the perpetual necessities of intrigue end in corrupting the temper whose chief pursuit is passion.

Women who environ a man's fidelity by ceaseless suspicion, and exaction, create the evil that they dread.

Ioris deceived this woman at first in trifles, later on in graver things, because she ruthlessly demanded from him an amount of time and a surrender of will which no man will ever give without becoming either openly or secretly a rebel. She had made him fear her, so he betrayed

her. In love, as in a kingdom, the tyrant sits upon a hollow throne.

But she was one of those to whom "an immense Me was the measure of the Universe;" and this "immense Me" obscured a sight otherwise sharp as the hawk's and clear as the pigeon's.

Meantime Ioris once more rose to the light of the day with the sense that the day might bring some charm he was not sure of, some interest he would not exhaust. Once more the delight of the uncertain had come to him, playing fitfully about his path; and once more the sound of the lutes in the moonlight, the sheen of the stars above the palms and laurels, seemed in unison with his fancies, because, once more, he felt young. He did not reason about it, because he was a man who never reasoned when he could avoid doing so, and who always shut his eyelids as long as he could to what was inconvenient or painful. But he resigned himself with few struggles to the fresh influences that stole on him, and never asked himself when they would leave him.

His mistress had been right when she had said that there was something of the Faust and something of the Romeo in him, but there was still more of the Hamlet. He would bear the ills he had, for fear of others that he knew not of; and would question himself at times—

Am I a coward?
 It cannot be
 But I am pigeon-livered, and lack gall
 To make oppression bitter.

The delicate, fanciful reasoning, the vacillation of thought which produced infirmity of purpose, the wounded pride which took refuge in silence, the complexity of impulses which, baffled at unravelling them both friend and

foe, the armour of jest, the inner core of sadness, had all of them the Hamlet cast. Like Hamlet he could smile upon his foe; like Hamlet he could make mock of his own dishonour; like Hamlet he was destined to say of the deepest passion of his life, "You should not have believed me: I loved you not," and love the more all the while he said it.

CHAPTER XXI.

"How ridiculous it is that *she* should go to such places!" said the Lady Joan a day or two later, with wrath and scorn, as she ate her breakfast, flinging away a local journal which recorded the name of Etoile in the list of guests at a Russian Grand Duchess's party.

"Why ridiculous?" said Ioris between his teeth, without looking up. His face grew darker as he stooped and picked up the paper.

"Why?" screamed the Lady Joan. "*Why?* It is worse than ridiculous! It is disgusting!"

"Why?" said Ioris very coldly.

The Lady Joan burst out laughing.

"Good heavens, Io! Where have you lived? You who used to know Paris like a book; you who pretend to know the world!"

"I do not understand," said her lover still coldly.

"Oh, don't you! I should think you might well enough, though you never can see half-an-inch before your nose! Look what a life she's led!"

"Perfectly innocent? That is rare. But is it forbidden, objectionable?"

The Lady Joan shrieked with fresh laughter.

"Innocent? You're innocent! Why, only listen to anybody talking about her for ten minutes, and you'll

hear enough to set your very hair on end. You never went to 'em, I suppose; but her Sunday evenings in Paris were!—that I do know for a fact. Even respectable *men* wouldn't go."

Ioris laughed a little slightly.

"I have never met anyone of my sex so very virtuous. I suppose those very virtuous men belong to your country. But *ma chère*, since you know such things of her, why receive her?"

"It was that old beast Voightel."

"Surely it was your father?"

"Oh, Lord, no! She hardly knew papa. At least, yes, of course, she did know him, but he only went to her now and then."

"Where the respectable men would not go? Poor Lord Archie!"

The Lady Joan coloured and grew angry.

"You know very well what I mean; poor dear papa never is as particular as he ought to be." (Ioris thought of Lord Archie lying smoking under the cherry-trees of Fiordelisa, and mentally agreed that he was not.) "And she charms men, and all that kind of thing; improper women always do," continued the Lady Joan, who was so used to putting on her ruff of decorum that she would put it on sometimes even with those who had ruffled it the most. "The life of Etoile has been infamous, altogether infamous. I know so many people who know all about her, and of course since we became acquainted with her, I've naturally inquired more. If I had known all I do now, of course I never would have let her set her foot in my door."

"It is a very beautiful foot," said Ioris, who felt a great anger in him that he dared not display, and could not altogether smother; and, either by accident or design, his eyes glanced at the foot of the Lady Joan, visible from the shortness of her skirt, in the large stout boot which tramped over his ploughed fields and in and out so many studios, and up and down so many stairs of the Bona Dea's temples. The glance and the words filled up the measure of her fury—a fury she smothered as he did his anger, for these two people, whilst living in the closest intimacy, almost habitually deceived one another. She flung herself round to a bureau, and took out a letter and threw it to him.

"There, read that, since you don't believe *me!*"

Ioris read; his eyebrows drew together a little, but otherwise his face did not change. He read it calmly through, then gave it back to her.

"Conclusive—if true."

It was a letter from a man who did ill in art what Etoile did supremely well; a man who had hungered after her successes with envious greed for many a year; a man, moreover, who had endeavoured to pay court to her and had failed. To him, knowing him well, the Lady Joan had written a careless question or two about Etoile: in answer he had poured out—exaggerated—all that calumny had ever invented of her. Lady Joan had relied on the almost certain fact that when a man's or woman's nature is not noble, it will be very petty indeed; there is but little middle way betwixt the two.

"Conclusive, if true," said Ioris carelessly, and handed her the sheet. "But why should we quarrel about her? She is nothing to us: and she is here to-day and will be gone to-morrow."

His heart was beating with anger and impatience, and a certain sickness of doubt was stealing upon him, and with it also a better impulse of chivalrous championship of the wronged and absent woman. But habit was stronger with him than any of these feelings, and it was his habit constantly to conceal all his real thoughts from his inquisitor. The screw never brings forth but a galled lie.

"If true!" echoed the Lady Joan a little more satisfied, locking up her letter. "There's no 'if' about it. Anybody who knows her will tell you the same thing. It was disgraceful of my father to send her to *me*; but Voightel can always turn him round his finger, and Voightel's a beast."

Ioris remained silent; he had heard Voightel rhapsodised over in the Casa Challoner with the most fervent worship as the most learned, most distinguished, most marvellous of men, and once, when he had been expected there, though he had not arrived, had seen the driest of wines, the choicest of pipes, the sweetest of words got ready to salute his arrival.

At the instant Mr. Challoner entered.

"We were talking of Etoile, Robert," said his wife. "Aren't you disgusted with that brute, Voightel, persuading my father to send her to *me*?"

Mr. Challoner was used to catching quickly a clue.

"It was certainly ill-advised," he said in his best and most wooden manner. "One cannot be too careful, and there are very odd stories—"

The Lady Joan felt that there were moments in which Mr. Challoner was priceless.

"So I was saying to Io," she answered him. "Her life in Paris was always very queer, wasn't it?"

"And you are always over-indulgent and hasty," said Mr. Challoner, with the paternal manner which now and then he assumed with much effect. "Yes; yes. Of course it would have been better not to have known her, but when we go to the country the acquaintance will die a natural death, and if she be here another winter we need not resume it. Here is a telegram from Sicily, Ioris."

Telegrams from Sicily were always flying in at the Casa Challoner.

In gratitude to Free Italy for the agreeable refuge she gave them, and the many tea-cups and triptychs she let them pick up, Mr. Challoner and his wife (or rather his wife and Mr. Challoner) had determined on creating for her a tubular bridge.

The bridge was to go over the Straits of Messina, by the Gulf of Faro, and connect Sicily with the mainland, and do away with brigandage and barbarism for ever and aye. There was very little of it made as yet, except upon paper; nothing, indeed, except some piles that had been driven in on the shore by Scylla; but the prospectus had been out, and the shares all sold for four years past, and a Scotch duke was the nominal head of it, and a great many clerks and contractors were fussing and fuming over it alike in Calabria and Cannon Street, and money was turning about it in the churn of the Exchanges and Chambers of Commerce.

"My bridge," the Lady Joan called it, with a fine wholesale appropriation—as she said "my farm" when talking of Fiordelisa.

She thought herself a great woman of business. The

age of Money, of Concessions, of Capitalists, and of Limited Liabilities, has largely produced the female financier, who thinks, with M. de Camors, that "*l'humanité est composée des actionnaires.*" Other centuries have had their especial type of womanhood; the learned and graceful *hetaira*, the saintly and ascetic recluse, the warrior of Oriflamme or Red Rose, the *dame de beauté*, all loveliness and light, like a dew-drop, the philosophic *précieuse*, with sesquipedalian phrase, the revolutionist, half nude of body and wholly nude of mind, each in their turn have given their sign and seal to their especial century, for better or for worse. The nineteenth century has some touch of all, but its own novelty of production is the female speculator.

The woman who, breathless, watches *la hausse* and *la baisse*; whose favour can only be won by some hint in advance of the newspapers; whose heart is locked to all save golden keys; who starts banks, who concocts companies, who keeps a broker, as in the eighteenth century a woman kept a monkey, and in the twelfth a knight; whose especial art is to buy in at the right moments, and to sell out in the nick of time; who is great in railways and canals, and new bathing-places, and shares in fashionable streets; who chooses her lovers, thinking of concessions, and kisses her friends for sake of the secrets they may betray from their husbands:—what other centuries may say of her who can tell?

The Hôtel Rambouillet thought itself higher than heaven, and the generation of Catherine of Sienna believed her deal planks the sole highway to the throne of God.

But the present age is blessed with the female finan-

cier, and must make the best of her, as it must of the rotten railways, the bubble banks, the choked-up mines, the sand-filled canals, the solitudes of brick and mortar, which it owes to her genius.

Lady Joan believed herself to be one of these modern blessings. For those who would listen to her, she had always miracles to tell of firms she saved and concessions she obtained, of minister's graces won by her smile, and monarchs' signatures obtained by her intercession. According to herself, there was scarce a steamer that floated or banker that prospered, or traction-engine that ran, or new street that was traced out, from the Thames to the Nile, from the Danube to the Tigris, that did not owe something to her procreative or protecting powers. She described herself as a kind of ambulatory Lamp of Aladdin, and if you only rubbed her up (the right way) she would make a palace spring up for you like a mushroom. How much of this was true, and how much imagination, was perhaps one of those things that no man will ever know—like the real thoughts of Lord Beaconsfield, or the real use of the secret-service money in England, or the real discoveries of the Black Cabinet under Persigny. It was an Eleusinian mystery.

Profane persons were apt to consider that her ability for commerce was chiefly exercised in buying pots and pans and chairs and tables, in old shops, in old highways and byways wherever she went, north, south, east, or west. But this was ill-nature. She really had a talent for getting up companies, and persuading people to take shares in them, and was very fond of running up the back-stairs of politics, and coming down them with the pot-luck of a ministerial concession or of a royal subsidy, picked up from the seething stewpan of international jobberies.

Her lovers devoutly believed in her as a woman of business. It was not an attribute that attracted, but it was one that awed them. "Damn it, madam, who falls in love with attributes?" says Berkeley. Probably no one. But the chain once fastened, certain attributes may serve to rivet it, especially when they are fear-compelling.

In his soul Ioris detested these South Sea Bubbles that his mistress was so fond of blowing. It is not engaging to see the Bourse quotations seized as eagerly as your love-notes could be, or to have a tender silence broken by a sudden recollection that Macmaw and Fill-jaw's telegram at once must be answered.

But, though it revolted him, it served to entangle him. His name was of use to her; she taught him how to obtain concessions, and knew herself how to work them when got; his influence was of use to her; his title sparkled on the Messina Bridge prospectus before the Board in Cannon Street, and enabled her to say in England that she had all Italy at her beck and call, as in Italy she said that she had all England. She was a woman of resources and of foresight; gradually she drew all his affairs into her hands, and made him drift at her will hither and thither; she got him into the habit of being guided by her, and habit has much weight on a southern temper; she thrust through her amorous butterfly the honey-laden pin of commerce, and fastened down the wings that, without it, would have borne him to fresher flowers.

Besides, Finance served her well in other ways than this; if Paris and Menelaüs had gone together to build a bridge or dig a canal they could never afterwards, for very ridicule's sake, have called up Greece to arms.

"They've gone to Calabria together to see about my bridge!" she would say to Mrs. Grundy at five o'clock tea. "Such a bore, isn't it? I'm quite dull without them. But it will be a grand thing for Italy when it is done; so one must not mind trouble."

"They" was her pet pronoun, her horse of battle, her choice piece of prudence, and Mrs. Grundy would go away and say to Mrs. Candour, "He's only with her so much because they're making a tubular bridge by the Gulf of Faro. The Duke of Oban is president of it; a great deal of English money is put into it. Fine idea, very. Her idea originally, I believe. Oh! what a cruel backbiting world we live in, my dear!"

Meanwhile, until "they" came back from Calabria, Lady Joan petted good-looking Douglas Græme, or handsome Eccellino da Sestri, or Guido Serravalle with his guitar, or anybody else that came handy, and had cosy little dinners with plump Mimo in the corner, and tune-ful Guido to sing to her, and enjoyed herself exceedingly, and wrote to Ioris word every day that she was wretched.

This winter morning, however, the telegram brought no call to Calabria, and she had planned to spend it at Fiordelisa. Mr. Challoner—the telegram disposed of—proceeded to tell her that it was ten o'clock, and the ponies were standing at the door.

The morning was still very cold; snow was still upon all the hills, a fierce wind was blowing boisterously down the face of the river; it was not attractive weather for the country. Ioris sighed uneasily as he took up all her shawls, and went downstairs, to be driven by her across the Campagna in the teeth of the Alpine blasts.

Mr. Challoner stood in the window upstairs, and watched their departure with the nearest approach to a smile that ever appeared upon his countenance. Then he went into his own little sanctum, stirred up his fire, sat down in his most comfortable chair, and began to read his French and English papers. He felt that this morning at least he had the better part.

"He's a very useful fellow to me," Mr. Challoner had said in an unguarded moment once, over some sherry, to old Lord George Stair, who had mumbled a vague assent, and had thought, amongst other wicked things he had read in his far-away youth, of Diderot's song of *Six Sous* that Grimm quotes in his Memoirs.

Meantime, while Mr. Challoner enjoyed his *Pall Mall Gazette* and his *Figaro* before an oak-fire, with a pipe of fragrant tobacco to make him yet more comfortable, the ponies sped on, under the lash of his wife's whip, through the chilly and windy morning.

"Are you grown dumb, Io?" she said sharply, as they flew over the frosted turf.

Ioris drew his furs closer across his mouth.

"It is not agreeable to swallow ice," he said coldly, but the ice that hurt him was the ice at his heart, not the ice in the air.

"It is only jealousy made her say those things!" he was thinking to himself, and his fealty went out to Etoile, with the eager revolt and the caressing devotion that slander of an absent thing he cares for will rouse in any man who has a man's heart beating within him.

And he cared for her greatly already, though he was half unwilling and half afraid to face the truth of it and

all its perils, and hid it from himself under the shelter of a thousand plausible synonyms and reasons.

The Lady Joan, who heeded cold weather no more than she heeded the cold shoulder of a desirable acquaintance, cut his ponies over the ears and rattled onward with her pistol-case under her feet, in case she should be in a mood to shoot cats or robins, on both of which she waged fiery war.

The cats might kill a chicken, and the robins steal a cherry.

Ioris often pleaded for both, but in vain.

The grand old house looked bleak and dreary in the cloudy angry day, with the mountain winds rushing through the leafless aisles of its vineyards. Imperator howled in his kennel, and the heart of his master ached. The Lady Joan sprang down at the courtyard gate, and kilted her skirts high, and wrapped her waterproof about her, and calling out for Gian, for Vico, for Beppo, for Cecco, whilst those frightened servitors came tumbling out from stable, winecellar, toolhouse, and barn, strode away, to the delight of her soul, scolding, weighing, scrutinising, ordering, railing, altering, chaffering, bullying, raising heaven and earth because a measure was short, and unpacking a waggon-load of cabbages to make sure that their number was right. She had a hundred thousand things to do before she could enjoy herself and shoot her cats and robins.

Ioris, free for the moment, lighted a cigar and strolled away by himself over his lonely fields, green with the tender young corn and red with barberry and briony. He heard her voice in loud discussion with his bailiff as to which Roman bull was to be mated with the new

brindled cow from Alderney, and shuddered a little in disgust as he heard. "Her Breviary is the stock-book!" he thought, and went on his lonely walk under the edge of the woods.

He thought of Etoile by her hearth.

Would she miss him this morning?

With Ioris gentle impulses were natural. His character had in it that honey of softness which the flies will eat—and tigers and bears as well as flies. Old people lived on him with no other claim than their utter uselessness; hangers-on devoured his substance because he had not resolution enough to cut them adrift; a poor old homeless soul slipt and broke her limb as he was passing, and he took her into his own house and kept her there year upon year; an unwillingness to see pain, and an aversion to wound, were strong in him; Lady Joan found it out and despised it, and laughed at it, and profited by it all at once. "Io's such a fool," she would say—and think him such a fool—and yet all the while love the folly in him from its own utter unlikeness to herself.

It had grown to be with him as of old it was with the Capet kings and their Maires du Palais. The natural indolence and infirmity of purpose which often cripples many fine and delicate minds, found relief in her strong opinions and her decisive action. It became so much easier to answer, "Ask the signora," than to decide for himself between disputing servants or to refuse for himself a suppliant's petition. Things had to be done that he was not hard enough or rough enough to do himself; it became so much simpler to say "Go to the signora" than incur an hour's contention, or send away an old

farmer with tears in his eyes. She liked all this kind of authority and tyranny; and he detested it. So the habit of reliance on her grew; and being first sown by the generosity of his nature, became fast rooted in his nature's weakness.

There was not a question but that things went on in much more orderly mode since she had hung up her cachemire at Fiordelisa.

The old happy, careless, wasteful ways were ended, just as the old wooden ploughs that might have served Cincinnatus were replaced by new steel ones from Sheffield. True, the people were sullen and discontented; true, there was not a shepherd that did not scowl where he had been used to smile, as he leaned on his staff on the thyme-covered hills, and watched his padrone go by.

"But look at the figures at Torlonia's," she would say if he remonstrated.

And how could he remind her that the figures at Torlonia's were not at the head of his own balance-sheet?

There are things that a man cannot say.

She had twisted the steward's whip and pen out of his hands with a jerk, had sent the drones and parasites flying, had brought the devil incarnate, the people thought, in screaming farm-engines; had cut down all the estimates and all the wages, and nipped off the beggar's crusts to crumble whole loaves away on her own hobbies, and had let her fancy run riot in building and cattle-breeding, if she could be said to have anything about her so aerial and foolish as a fancy.

All this was noisy, unpleasant, interminable work,

though she thought it a paradise, and pooh-poohed any demurrer or remonstrance on the part of the master of Fiordelisa with the sublime disdain she always showed for other people's feelings.

In the years that had elapsed since the family had gone there with the flower-seeds, and the kitchen boiler, and been first visited there by Lady George Scrope-Stair with her sanctifying knitting-needles, the quiet noble old place had known few moments of peace. Hammers had almost always been going; workmen working; smiths soldering; delvers digging; in a confusion of sounds that made Ioris's head ache, and made yawning gaps in his capital for endless wages. There is nothing in the world so amusing as to make improvements when other people will pay for them; vestries, landscape-gardeners, architects and city ædiles, all know this; and Lady Joan was not a whit behind vestries and ædiles in her appreciation of it.

Ioris looked wistful when a brave row of evergreen oaks fell, to give place to a row of bran new granaries, raised on new principles; or a rosegarden perished, to make an acre of asparagus and pine-apple beds; he looked grave when he saw the sum-total that the new granaries and the asparagus and pine-apple beds cost; did not the old barns and threshing-floors, the old vegetables and orchards, do just as well?

"You'll find the profit of it all by and by," said the Lady Joan to him: as the vestries and ædiles say so to the public. But he failed ever to see the profit; he could only see Black Care as the bills came in, and the labourers crowded round his steward to be paid, week after week, month after month.

No doubt, Lady Joan was a great administrator, but great administrators are expensive luxuries to the states which support them.

Ioris had never been rich, and with the new granaries and asparagus-beds, and all the other improvements, he felt himself growing poorer every hour.

He was very tired of it. He was stung by the muttered words and dark glances of his peasantry. He liked to be well with all people, and the discontent of his contadini oppressed him. In other years, when he had made brief visits in the vintage time, the people had worshipped him and met him with music and laughter and song, and their tributes of fruits and of flowers; now they passed him sullenly, or if they stopped him, stopped but to complain. He was pained by them and for them—but he did nothing. Personal kindness he would show them whenever he could. But he did not lift his hand to stay hers that fell so heavily on them.

He loved them as he loved the hound Imperator. But he feared her more.

Often he would go out in the fields and roam by himself, for very weariness, and then on the beautiful wild hillside, scarlet with poppies, and fragrant with the wild cistus bushes, he would meet some old man or some young child, who would stop him and hold their hand out, and mutter of the tyrannies of the "padrona" up at the house, and he would give them money that he could ill afford, and go back impatient and sorrowful, and, as he passed through the house, hear the notes of the mandoline twanging, and the tinkle of the coffee-cups upon the terrace, and the laughter of Lady Joan and of Burletta, and would avoid it all with a vague distaste,

and go up to his own room and lock himself in there and glance at his mother's portrait, and know that he had sinned and met his retribution.

In these old noble places life should be "set to music;" Love, in its highest passion and its fairest forms; Art as the gift of God to man; day dreams, in which the hours unfold, beautiful and uncounted, like the leaves of the oleander flowers; nights, when "the plighted hands are softly locked in sweet unsevered sleep;" gay laughter here and there, glad charity with all things; meditation now and then to deepen the wellsprings of the mind; the open air always; limbs bathed in the warmth as in a summer sea; the opal skies of evening watched with fancies of the poets; and everywhere perpetual sense of a delicious rest, and of desire and of hope crowned to fruition; this was the life for Fiordelisa.

And he knew it.

And he instead abode in this; fierce wrangle, lowest aims; shrewd watchfulness for gain, perpetual chatter of art as means of loss and profit; hard tyranny and sated possession that dressed themselves as passion, and made dupes one of each other; and all through the long and radiant hours of the day one voice for ever ringing in glee or wrath because a bird was shot, or theft of grain unpunished, or grapes by the high road poached, or old coins found dug up under the garden-mould that could be sold again, or old pottery found in some poor peasant's hut, bought for a loaf of bread, and good in the winter for the guineas of a millionaire.

And he endured the one life and he dreamed of the other; and knew what the years might be, yet bore with them as they were from habit and from fear and from

inertia, and meanwhile the Lady Joan reigned as she chose in Fiordelisa, and cut the trees, and weighed the produce, and vulgarised the rooms, and harried the peasantry, and meddled with the winepresses, and rooted herself into the soil, so that never should any step save hers be heard there, and never any offspring of his old race bloom there; and heeded not the desolation that she worked for him; heeded it no more than she did the curse of the peasant hungering in his hut, or the pangs of the song-bird dying in the summer.

What did his sighs or his people's matter to her?

So long as she kept Fiordelisa and drove Pippo and Grillo about, and trafficked in pictures and laces and furniture, and exhibited her lover in all places and possibilities to everybody as her prey and property and appendage, what did it matter to her whether the heart of the man was weary, or his nerves jaded, or his passion worn out; what did it matter to her that all liberty and peace and gladness had withered for him under her touch? What did it matter to her that he shut his eyes with a shudder from facing the blank that was all his hereafter?

Women who love to folly may watch with terror a weary glance, may torture their own hearts in endless doubt whether they be not unworthy of the heart that beats upon theirs, may be ready to cast themselves adrift on a sea of misery rather than drag as a weight for a day on the life that is dearer than their own soul to them. But the Lady Joan was no such fool.

She had got him and she held him fast, as a fisherman a prize from the sea. He might writhe, might sigh, might struggle, might sicken, might be weary at times unto death—what did she care for that? She saw a

glimpse of it sometimes, and it smote her vanity to the quick, though she never comprehended its full import; but it never entered her thoughts to release him or offer him release. She only pulled the curb tighter, and revenged herself by sharper observation and by harder tyranny.

So long as she had what she wanted, and incurred no mortification in the sight of others, she was not likely to set him free for any consideration so slight and unimportant to her as his own wishes. Weak women thought about those things, but Lady Joan was strong.

This day seemed to him more long and tedious than any he had ever passed.

When they sat down to luncheon in the chilly tapestried room which wanted summer and the roses of summer to brighten it, she entertained him with a bead-roll of her victories and her captives, of a stable-boy's theft punished, a kite killed and nailed to the door, a hundred thrushes trapped for market, a fox's earth found and stopped, that the fox might die of suffocation in its hole, a false bottom to a sieve detected as the grain was measured, an error found in the manure receipts, a stray dog shot, a cat hanged by the neck, a litter of pigs born. He listened wearily; he was tired of it all, because he was tired of her.

As yet he scarcely realised that this—the *quart d'heure de Rabelais*, to which all passion that is merely passion comes soon or late—had struck for him. He was silent and inattentive throughout the midday meal; and, when at length the Lady Joan, furious at his indifference, uprose from his table and threw some silver off it, and told him that he deserved to be ruined, and die in the hospital,

and that she was a fool to fag out her life for him as she did, he could only sit silent still, being unable to reply according to his honest thoughts, and only hoped that she would not go into hysterics. Lady Joan could have hysterics when all other weapons failed, as well as the merest Rosa-Matilda that ever breathed.

This time, however, she did not go into them, because she had a great many last instructions to give to the *buttero* about that Alderney cow, and also remembered that she was to dine at seven o'clock with her cousins Lord and Lady Fingal at the Îles Britanniques. For checking hysterics there is no receipt so good as to remember a dinner-party.

It was twilight in the freezing winter's day when she deigned at length to depart, with some pine-apples out of the hotbeds for her friends, 'and give her last order, and leave the grand old house to the night and the cold, and drive back across the plain with two mounted shepherds behind them, well-armed, in case of any thieves that might spring from behind a ruined tomb or cluster of acacias.

They reached home in safety, where Mr. Challoner, having passed a tranquil afternoon in the club and at the Messina bridge offices, where he was held an oracle, was waiting, ready-dressed for the Fingal dinner, with lighted lamps and an evening newspaper, serene and solemn in his solitude as a Red Indian chief at a "big smoke."

Ioris, who was not invited to the Fingal party, excused himself from remaining to see them off on the plea of a chill he had felt and much correspondence to answer, and hurried to the house of Etoile ere it should be the hour for his attendance at the Quirinale.

"I cannot sleep without seeing her," he said to himself.

"What on earth's come to Io, I wonder," said the Lady Joan very crossly. "He's always ill now—or stupid."

Mr. Challoner lifted his eyes from his *Pall Mall Gazette*.

"In love," he said, curtly, with immovable visage, and replaced his eyeglass, which had dropped. He and his wife always kept up a polite fiction between themselves, even in private; Ioris was their mutual friend.

Lady Joan darted from her brilliant eyes such a look of flame as a tigress might give whose hard-earned prey was snatched from her jaws.

"Pshaw!" she said savagely, "what an idiot you are, Robert, always!"

Mr. Challoner perused the *Pall Mall Gazette* unmoved: revenge was sweet, but peace was sweeter.

Fortunately, to preserve his peace in the absence of the supreme guardian of it, there entered handsome Douglas Græme, her cousin, who came to escort his cousin to their other cousins, the Fingals; and Lady Joan rushed to get herself into Genoa velvet, Irish point, and English propriety.

Meanwhile Ioris went and found Etoile in her chamber alone by the warmth of the hearth, and the spacious, quiet room, with its smell of hothouse heliotropes, and the odorous many-flowered narcissus—which in Italy we call *tazzette*, and in France *Jeannettes*, and in England have no popular name for, because we have not the plant—looked very familiar and inviting to him as he entered it, himself jaded, cold, and weary.

"I can stay but a few moments, I fear, but I thought I might venture to ask if you were well," he said, softly bending to her with that look in his eyes by which a man tells the woman he looks on that she is a dearer sight to him than any other the world holds.

"You are not well yourself, you seem tired?" Her voice trembled a little as she spoke to him, and her eyes fell before his.

"I am tired," he said, with a sigh.

The long, tasteless, dreary day unrolled before his memory as he spoke, begun in the chilly morning with altercation and strife, worn away in common cares and calculations of price and profit, ended with rough dispute or with coarse mirth as the sun began to grow low behind his leafless vineyards. They were all alike, these weary days, when it pleased his despot to call him forth in the cold mist that rose from the river, and make him go out to the old grey castle on the hill to levy tribute from his farms, and number his winter fruits, and harry the hearts of his people, in the pastime that she called looking after Fiordelisa.

Once, when this passion had been young in him, he had risen joyfully enough to skim the grey Campagna with her ere the day was fully up, and pass the hours in enamoured willingness in the solitudes of his deserted halls. But now!—he rose to these days with a yawn, he felt their dull length drag on and on with a sigh; they left him at their close worn out and disdainful of himself.

"I am tired," he said, now, standing by the fire, and letting his eyes rest themselves in dreamy contemplation on Etoile.

She gave him a yellow rose from a cluster that she

had been placing in water as he had entered; there was tea standing near her on a little Japanese stand; she poured him out a cup, and brought it to him by the hearth; he followed all her movements with a sense of content and peace.

As she tendered him the little cup, his fingers caressed hers, and as he drew the cup away, his lips lingered on her wrist.

She coloured and left him.

"Where have you come from now?" she asked him as she went to the roses.

The words stung him as a snake stings.

"I have come from Fiordelisa."

"Alone?"

"No! Have I ever the luxury to be alone?"

Her heart beat quicker with an anger that she did not seek to analyse.

"Why complain of what is your choice?"

"Was it ever *my* choice?" he muttered, thinking of those earliest hours when a black-browed stranger had set her will to bring him to her feet.

"Surely it must have been when you gave Fiordelisa."

"I never gave Fiordelisa. I thought at most of one summer—of two—"

"Then how is it?"

"How? Can I bid her go? I?"

Etoile rose and walked to and fro a moment impatiently, pushing her hair out of her eyes.

"It is useless for me to pretend to misunderstand. Your position is not one a woman can talk of—without shame. But it were absurd to deny that I see it in its true light, and that I am very sorry for you; very, very

sorry! And yet how can you live on in it? The triangle of Dumas!—how unreal, how deceitful, how contemptible, how absolutely immoral in the deepest sense of immorality's degradation, is this sin that you and she, and the world with you, call Friendship. Sin!—the naked sins of the old days were innocence and decency beside it. One can excuse sin that is honest, one can comprehend the fatal force of a blind passion, one can see how even an unholy love may be redeemed by sacrifice and courage. But this!—it is only one long lie palmed off upon the world, and as cowardly as every lie must ever be!”

“The world is not deluded by the lie, believe me,” said Ioris with his delicate contempt.

“If you had loved this woman,” she pursued disregarding, “if you had loved her really with any kind of great love, however guilty before the laws of man, could you have ever borne to live like this, to take the husband's hand, to caress the child, to act the social farce—if you had really loved her with any truth of love, such share of her with her duties and her friends would have been impossible to you, such adoption of her hearth and home would have been loathsome!”

“There is love and love,” said Ioris. “You think of a kind of love that is seldom felt, that women like her cannot kindle. You do not understand——”

“No! I do not understand. I understand passion, though I have not felt it—if you had struck the husband down upon the hearth, and borne the wife away from all the world—that I could have understood.”

Ioris laughed a dreary scornful laugh.

“I know not which soonest would have repented such a tragedy—she or he or I. There are women for whom

the world may well be lost. Seriously, can you think her one of them?"

"You must have thought her one of them once, at the least, or else——"

"Good heavens! how little you realise, how little you comprehend——"

His thoughts drifted back to the early time when a new comer with basilisk eyes had cast her toils about him. The love born and matured behind black masks, in the fumes of cigarette smoke, in the riot of cotillons, in the daybreak hours after a ball, was not the love of which his companion spoke. The world well lost for love!—he laughed out of the very weariness and heart-sickness of his soul, thinking of his mistress in loup and domino—in ruff and starch—screaming in the dingy crowd of the opera ball—lunching off lamb and lettuce with a dean!

"Perhaps I do not comprehend. I am glad then I do not!" said Etoile, with more impatience than she knew. "If you slew the husband—or he you—I am barbarian enough to feel that that might come within my sympathies. It would at least be frank!"

Ioris laughed lightly and bitterly.

"Poor man! he is terribly tiresome and *très-bourgeois*. But why should I kill him for that? As to his killing me, I am his best friend, his *souffre-douleur*, his whipping-boy. Whatever other qualities he may lack, he is not ungrateful,—to me!"

Etoile unconsciously pulled asunder a rose she held, and shred its petals on the floor.

"I said I was sorry for you. I retract it. Since you can jest so about your fate, you are worthy of it."

"Jest!—I?"

He stooped and took her hands, and kissed them with a half-timid and half-passionate tenderness.

"If I jest, it is to hide that I suffer. Be sorry for me, Heaven knows I need it."

And he kissed her hands again, and went to the Court, where he was in waiting that night.

Etoile stood by her hearth with the fallen rose leaves at her feet.

She felt as if some share of their falsehood and of their shame had fallen on her.

And yet a sweet and subtle joy which she felt afraid of, stole upon her too.

CHAPTER XXII.

MEANTIME the Lady Joan went and dined with her cousins, the Fingals, and returned thence, much out of temper, to her own house. The dinner at the Fingals had tried her patience sorely; it had been severe, dreary, dull; she had sat between an archæologist and a travelling Oxford Professor; neither had felt her fascinations, one had corrected her on a point of art; it was an utterly "blank day," both for business and amusement. She felt as ill-used as any M. F. H. who has been out from noon to night in rain and fog, and has never once "found." Lady Joan hated waste of time, or waste of anything, even of lamp-cottons; and she scolded her servants for having so many lamps burning when she went home.

By the light of one of them she read some telegrams and letters; they did not improve her temper. They told her that the shares of the Bridge over the Messina Straits, to which the Italian ministers had refused the subsidy, were a drug on the market, and that a fine Parmeggianino she had sent to London for sale had been examined by rude experts, and declared good for nothing, but the big piece of cypress-wood on which it was painted.

"Fools! dolts! idiots!" said Lady Joan, sweeping all the European exchanges and all European connoisseurs into the mighty circle of her scorn. *She* had promoted the Bridge, *she* had purchased the Parmeggianino; was that not enough for the world?

"They'll say my pigs are not Berkshires next!" she said in her wrath.

"No, no, no," murmured Burletta, who had come in for a midnight cigar. "No, no, no!—the pigs are transcendant pigs; of the plumpness and the roundness and the pinkness of babies are those pigs, and their bacon will be as a foretaste of paradise; but as for pictures, and especially the Parmeggianino, you will do me the justice to admit, cara mia——"

"That you're a transcendent ass!" said the Lady Joan, furiously.

The very dear old Mimo lifted his shoulders to his ears and his eyebrows to the ceiling, and solemnly lighted an enormous cheroot.

"I always said the Parmeggianino would not go down in the City of London; I always said that it would not go down," he reiterated, for he adored his goddess, but he adored still more proving himself in the right, and he had always averred that the Parmeggianino was too crude, was too brown, was too big, was too glazed, was too strong meat, in point of fact, even for Shoddy's acres of plaster walls.

"You thankless brute!" cried his Minerva, flinging all her letters away in a crumpled ball. "Is that all your gratitude for my getting your Tabernacle sold to the Fingals?"

The very dear old Mimo reposed his fat person comfortably amongst the sofa cushions.

"My Tabernacle is a beautiful Tabernacle," he said, tranquilly. "Pure *Quattro Cento*; pure *Quattro Cento*; that I will swear—not a detail of it that is not *Quattro Cento*; I chose every detail myself; and the wood is old—old—old—that too I will swear, and I ought to know, for

the wood was a flour-hutch of my mother's when I was a baby, per Bacco! What more would Milordo Fingal have?"

"You are an ass, Mimo!" said Lady Joan, again, but she laughed a little whilst she frowned.

"Che-che—no! That I am not," said Burletta, stoutly. "In my way I am very wise. I know what the City of London and its very clever people will accept and what it will not accept, though I have never been there. It will be on its knees before my Tabernacle, if Milordo Fingal will show it in their Fine Arts Court; all their South Kensington will adore my mother's flour-hutch. But I did always say, you will allow, that the Parmeggianino——"

Lady Joan gave him a sounding box on the ear. Undisturbed, Burletta picked up his cigar, which had been shaken out of his mouth by the shock, and kissed the Lady Joan's cruel fingers.

"Keep to the pigs, mia carissima, and let me choose the pictures," he said, with paternal tenderness. And together they smoked the calumet of peace.

In the recesses of his own soul Burletta began to have his doubts about Palmerstonè; began to think that Palmerstonè might after all not be very much more genuine than the overbig Parmeggianino. He began to think that Minerva, like Jove, sometimes nodded, and that the Messina Bridge, and other wonderful benefits to mankind, were not very much more trustworthy than his own rickety Renaissance chairs, and not one half as solid as that venerable flour-hutch, which his zeal for the antique had transformed into a tabernacle. But his misgivings he shut into his own loyal soul; and trotted about none the less valiantly, holding up his plump hands, and crying:

“What a woman—ah, what a woman! Such influence, such power, such wisdom! And yet, look how she stoops to trifles—those hams, those wines, those capons——” And then would be unable to proceed further from sheer ecstasy.

For to the very dear old Mimo who had slender fare at home, and indeed had been used to satisfy nature off a roll and a sausage at a small *osteria*, the breakfasts and dinners of the Casa Challoner and Fior-delisa were as banquets of the gods; and it would have been hard indeed if, in return for them, he would not have held up his hands and cried aloud:

“Such a woman—ah, such a woman! The world has not her equal. There is nothing that she does not know, and nothing that she cannot do—nothing, nothing, nothing!”

And a good many people believed him, as they believed in his cracked bits of Limoges and his flour-hutch that was promoted to a tabernacle. There is nothing that you may not get people to believe in if you will only tell it them loud enough and often enough, till the welkin rings with it. A *claque* is an institution not confined to theatres, and naturally for a well-born lady who would take Lord and Lady Fingal to see his yellow ivories and his old Cremona fiddles, and could get him sublime orders from the mighty Hebrides for all sorts of things, from church doors as big as Alps to enamels no bigger than your thumb, the good and grateful Mimo felt that he could never clap his hands loud enough before the stage of the world.

If she made mistakes—*ouf!*—she was a woman, or, at least, Mimo would say, with a sudden misgiving that this admission was derogatory to her—she was a goddess.

But he, who metaphorically was the owl at the feet of this Minerva, could be familiar with her, as the owl may have jovially flapped its wings in merry moments over the disbarred Casque and the unbuckled Ægis, and in such confidential familiarity would venture to say to her:

"Keep to the pigs, *mia carissima*, and let me choose the pictures."

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